NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS, MASS SUICIDE, AND PEOPLES TEMPLE
Scholarly Perspectives on a Tragedy

Edited by
Rebecca Moore & Fielding McGehee III

Table of Contents

Introduction

Rebecca Moore
Fielding M. McGehee III

On November 18, 1978 over 900 Americans died in a jungle settlement in Guyana, South America. Five were shot down as they attempted to leave an isolated airstrip. More than 200 children were murdered when their parents fed them poisoned fruit punch. An additional number of adults, perhaps fifty, perhaps one hundred, was coerced into taking a mixture of potassium cyanide and tranquilizers. The majority, however, willingly decided to take their lives rather than face the future.

The people who chose to die belonged to a religious group called Peoples Temple, which had its origin in Indianapolis, Indiana under the leadership of a charismatic messiah, Jim Jones. They had migrated from Indiana to a small town in northern California in the mid-1960s, and established a larger church in San Francisco several years later. In the mid-1970s, a small group of settlers pioneered a community in the dense jungles in the Northwest District of Guyana, a small English-speaking country in South America. The community was eventually called Jonestown.

Since the cataclysmic events of 1978, over twenty books and dozens of articles have been written on the subject of Peoples Temple and Jonestown. Two mass market paperbacks came out a few weeks after the deaths. In the four years following, numerous commercial books were published, culminating in what many consider the definitive popular work on the subject, *Raven*.

As several contributors to this book note, the initial framework for viewing the deaths was constructed by the anti-cult movement. Few scholars were prepared to offer instant analyses of what happened, and

why. Thus, the news media found anti-cultists and pop psychologists ready, and eager, to explain what happened and to discuss the danger of cults.

A few examples show how far we have progressed since November of 1978. At that time, the leader of Jews for Jesus suggested that those claiming to be a minister must register with the federal government to establish appropriate credentials and qualifications. At hearings sponsored by Senator Robert Dole in February 1979, law professor Richard Delgado proposed legislation forcing proselytizers to always identify their organizations, and requiring court-ordered psychiatry for converts. A writer for the *Los Angeles Times* advanced the idea of an "ethic of belief" with which all religions could be judged. One component of this ethic would be the extent to which dissent was allowed by the organization.

Cultists as well as cults were evaluated, and emerged from the analyses with serious psychological problems. "Many are tense, anxious, alienated, disappointed in themselves or their parents, and desperately hungry and groping for love, approval and guidance," said the past president for the American Psychoanalysts Association. *Parade Magazine* noted that cultists are "young, unhappy, unwanted, rootless, unemployed people...particularly vulnerable—easy marks for even the most demented brainwasher." And one imaginative reporter for the *Washington Post* wrote, "From a three-story gothic temple on San Francisco's Geary Boulevard, exerting an almost mystical hold over an army of followers estimated in the thousands, the charismatic Rev. Jim Jones worked his political magic."

As several contributors note, our culture tried to distance itself from Jonestown and all that it implied. Whether it was to identify the community as socialism run amuck, as an anti-communist vision of communism, or as merely the manipulation of a madman, writers across the country and across the political spectrum took pains to point out that Jonestown had little in common with America or Americans.

It took the academic community several years to digest what had happened. Tom Robbins notes in a review essay that despite hundreds of articles on cults and new religious movements, scholars had produced less than a handful of books about Jonestown by the mid-1980s. The situation has changed somewhat with the publication of several new works about Peoples Temple within the last year.

We have always felt that there can never be too much written about this subject. The suicides of so many people constitute an

enormous event, with religious, psychological, and historical implications. The confusing aftermath, the conflicting reports from committed members and disillusioned defectors, make up a jumbled account of what happened. We don't believe there is a single definitive work. Instead, there are a number of works that, put together, create the basis for understanding the reality of Peoples Temple and Jonestown.

To commemorate the tenth anniversary of Jonestown, therefore, we brought together the nation's leading Jonestown scholars to reconsider the profound issues and lingering legacy of the event. Three have written the most thoughtful books to come out: John Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land*; Steve Rose, *Jesus and Jim Jones*; and Judith Weightman, *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides*. The majority of other contributors have previously published papers on the subject.

In a very real sense, this single volume reflects the diversity of what has been written about Peoples Temple. Tom Robbins, John Hall, and Robert Fogarty examine Peoples Temple's historical antecedents. Judith Weightman, Barbara Hargrove, and Steve Rose place the organization within the context of religion and society. Steven Stack, Anson Shupe, David Bromley, Edward Breschel, Chris Hatcher and Michael Phillips relate Peoples Temple and Jonestown to specific cultural activities: suicide, the anti-cult movement, law and politics, and myth. Constance Jones reflects on the dualism within Jim Jones and the Temple which led to the organization's polarization and, eventually, to its death. Finally, John Moore discusses the importance of remembering in order to bring good out of "monstrous evil."

Rather than distancing ourselves from Jonestown, these writers attempt to find a place for it in the continuum of world history and the American experience. For example, Robbins and Hall examine other groups that experienced religious conflict, murder, and even mass suicide. In another dimension of comparison, Fogarty looks at Peoples Temple within the Utopian tradition.

This diversity of thought and technique is a strength. Using similar references, several writers come to different conclusions. The term "cult," for example, has been used to distance non-traditional religions with mainline groups. Yet even among the writers who discuss the term, there is little agreement as to what comprises a cult. The lessons of this lack of accord are obvious. If a group of scholars cannot agree on the truth of the matter, how much more unreliable must be other versions?

History comes down to us as names and dates and places that seem fixed in time. Occasionally we find out that the real story may not be what we were taught. Most of the time, however, we live quite comfortably with a history that rarely appears to change.

When we are *living* the history, as we must in the current age, the facts don't fit neatly together into a coherent story. Thus, when we learn that hundreds of people committed collective suicide, we have a statement of fact, but not a history. Even when more facts are assembled, we do not have a complete view of what actually happened.

We do not agree with all the conclusions our writers draw. At the same time, we believe their arguments are persuasive, well-researched, and valuable. Other readers will reach their own conclusions.

Scholars and laypersons alike must face the fact that Jonestown may always be a mystery in our lifetime. The governments of Guyana and the United States may release more information as time passes and distance protects those who participated. But the release of more information will not explain why Jonestown happened, and certainly will not illuminate the reasons people joined Peoples Temple in the first place. That is the job of scholars.

Thus, their research is an attempt to integrate history into our lives in a meaningful way. Rather than pointing to Jonestown as an aberration that has no relevance for the culture, scholars are helping society to understand that there was meaning in the event.

We often look fifty years down the road and wonder what people will think about Peoples Temple and Jonestown in the 21st century. We are concerned that they will be reduced to a single line, if that, in a history book; or that they will become a trivia question: "How many Americans died in a South American jungle in 1978?" We are concerned that the initial reports have become established truths. This volume has added significance, therefore, in that it contributes to the growing body of work that thoughtfully builds a new understanding of an important historical event.

We hope this book serves as a spur to other scholars interested in Jonestown and Peoples Temple. There is a wealth of material on the subjects. And there is a plethora of unanswered questions. This book tries to answer a few, but in the end, raises many more.

The Peoples Temple as a Continuation and an Interruption of Religious Marginality in America

Judith M. Weightman

The mass suicide of the members of the Peoples Temple in November of 1978 presented America — and the world — with a horror that was almost unimaginable. The most immediate task that we faced, as human beings, was to find some sort of meaning for it, some space in our reality, our mental universe, into which we could fit it. The question "why" demanded an immediate response to take the edge off this horror.

For most of us, this response took the form of distancing the suicides from ourselves: the easiest and most comfortable way to confront the piles of bodies was to deny that there was any connection whatsoever between those bodies and us. This was done, most simply, by shrugging and calling them insane. As meaning-craving beings, however, this simple response could not satisfy us for long, because it left us with the question of how they got to be that way. What was the source of their insanity? Who can we blame for this unspeakable horror?

There was an ideology available to us into which we could plug the whole phenomenon: the ideology of the anti-cult movement (ACM), which gave us a language of brainwashing and mind control, manipulation and abuse; a language which could, with an almost beautiful mental economy, explain and distance all at once. This was the language which was seized on with relief and used extensively to talk about the suicides.[1]

There are a variety of reasons for the virtual monopoly this ideology gained in the popular discussion. For one thing, it was readily available. The late 1960s and early 1970s had been a period of rich

religious experimentation in this country. This had, perhaps inevitably, created resistance, which had had the time to develop into a coherent ideology of opposition by the time of the suicides. More importantly, it had developed an institutional basis for that opposition.[2] The ACM had broadly disseminated its ideology through the popular media, so that it was available to anyone who read magazines or watched television. Despite its success in broadcasting its warnings, however, the ACM had been unable to mobilize much support outside their original constituency, the "concerned relatives," most importantly parents, of these "victims" of "destructive pseudo-religious cults." The ACM had thus begun to decline in energy and credibility. The suicides in 1978 changed that. Claiming vindication of all its previous warnings,[3] the ACM seized upon the suicides with relief. The color photographs of bodies lying in heaps around a vat of fruit punch seemed to provide proof of their claims. Hungry for some explanation of the suicides, the public gratefully accepted ACM rhetoric.

Thus the ACM ideology rushed in to fill a conceptual void in a time of crisis. By providing us with an internally coherent framework for explaining the suicides, the ACM had an immediate advantage over other sorts of explanations, which had to be developed from scratch. The main alternative source for an explanation was history: the problem was that there were no truly satisfying historical parallels. Religious historians cited the Jews of Masada, but few people had heard of them before November 1978. Modern historians pointed to the kamikaze pilots, but the Oriental mind is notoriously inscrutable to Westerners. The historical comparisons thus lacked the almost sensual satisfaction of clicking the suicides into their ordained mental place.

There are problems, however, with relying on ACM ideology to explain the Peoples Temple and its fate. The first problem is that the ideology cannot hold up as social-scientific theory in describing the dynamics of the new religions, the cults of the 1960s and 1970s.[4] The second problem is that even if it could, the Peoples Temple is not typical of these new religions, and should not be grouped with them. It is this second problem which is the primary focus of this essay.

*

In order to understand the nature of the Peoples Temple from a historical perspective, it is necessary to understand the nature of cult activity in general. According to Stark and Bainbridge,[5] the most help-

ful way to approach the long problematical issue of definition of religious organization is to examine the group in question in terms of the tension it experiences. They distinguish among groups by placing them along a continuum of greater or lesser tension with the society within which the group finds itself. A church is a group experiencing a very low degree of tension: it accepts, and is accepted by, the society at large. Both cults and sects, on the other hand, experience far greater degrees of tension. Both sorts of groups tend to reject the larger society as corrupt or ungodly, and are in turn rejected by that society as misguided crackpots. The faith of the cultist or sectarian is not understood by the larger society to be a "true faith," but rather a confused, heretical, or foolish collection of beliefs.

Stark and Bainbridge further distinguish between cults and sects on the basis of their origins. Sects are organizations that have broken off from another religious institution, usually a church, in the society of origin in order to recover the original teachings of that tradition, which are understood to have been lost. Thus, Protestantism began as a sectarian movement at the time of the Reformation, and most of what are now mainline Protestant denominations (i.e., churches) have a similar sectarian beginning. By decreasing tension with society — by both accepting the broader society and coming to be accepted within it as "normal" religious options — many, though not all, of these organizations move in a more church-like direction. For example, a movement which did not decrease tension, and which therefore remained sect-like, is that of the Amish. The movement toward increased respectability is enhanced for sects by the very fact that they are sects, that is, that they have broken off from what is generally recognized to be a religious organization. In other words, because of their origins in the mainstream religious culture (i.e., Christianity in America), the prerequisite for respectability is the sect's own decision to move in a direction of increased acceptance. All a sect has to do is to stop calling the larger society the whore of Babylon, and rapprochement is under way. Clearly, the Amish refusal to compromise is at the basis of their continuing sectarianism.

Although a sect movement may begin under the direction of a particular leader or leaders — someone has to be the source of the critique of the church which is the motivating energy in the development of a sect — that leadership will not necessarily be charismatic in the Weberian sense of the term. For example, Methodism began with John Wesley's critique of the Church of England and spread in the United States under the able direction of Francis Asbury. Both of these men

were necessary in the development of the movement, but neither of them relied on a charismatically based authority. In fact, a charismatic leader would prove to be counter-productive for a sectarian movement seeking to move in a more church-like direction, precisely because his or her authority is understood to derive from sources outside the normal channels of power.

Cults, like sects, are organizations in high tension with society, but they are groups which find their origin outside of the churches of that society. They may be founded through importation or through innovation. A churchly tradition outside of American society becomes cultlike here simply by virtue of its foreignness. For example, Buddhism in Japan functions as a church, but in the United States as a cult. More common in American society, however, are the cults founded through new revelation, such as those vouchsafed by Joseph Smith or Mother Ann Lee. Note that the two categories, importation and revelation, are not mutually exclusive. There are numerous examples of religious movements founded elsewhere on the basis of revelation and then brought to the United States, the Unification Church and the Shakers to name but two. For each of these, however, the element of innovation is the primary basis for labeling the movement as cultlike.

Since a cult is defined as any set of religious beliefs or religio-magical practices originating outside of the religious mainstream of the culture in question, it is helpful to further distinguish among them in terms of the degree of commitment demanded of their adherents. Stark and Bainbridge identify three levels of cult activity: the audience cult, the client cult, and the cult movement. The audience cult involves the promulgation of certain beliefs, demanding little beyond attention from the consumer of these beliefs. It operates at the level of mythology. Examples include anything printed in the supermarket tabloids about the supernatural: astrology, UFOs, Big Foot, the recent sightings of Elvis in Kalamazoo. Neither the providers nor the consumers of these teachings are organized in any systematic fashion, and the beliefs do not constitute the believer's primary religious commitment.

With a client cult, the providers do maintain an ongoing organization in order to present their teachings to one-time clients. These teachings generally have to do with specific techniques for improving the client's physical and/or emotional health and well-being, and thus operate at the level of magic. Examples are est, Dianetics, and much of the so-called "New Age" spirituality currently in vogue. Again, partici-

pation in a client cult does not involve the consumer's primary religious commitment.

It is only with the cult movement that we see what would generally be recognized as a full-fledged religion involving the believer's primary religious commitment. It is at this level that the followers of the teachings, as well as the providers, become organized into congregations, and it is at this level that the teachings involve more than the entertaining mythology of the audience cult or the specific practices of the client cult, taking on the trappings of a comprehensive world view. In addition, the cult movements usually revolve around charismatic leaders who provide the revelation or are responsible for the cult's importation, and who play a very different role from leaders of sects. Charismatic leaders demand a loyalty from their followers which is inexplicable and often threatening to outsiders. As a result, it is the cult movement which is the primary target of the anti-cult movement.

*

This theoretical background is helpful in understanding the reasons that the United States has provided such a fertile setting for the birth and spread of a wide variety of cult activity representing all three levels of involvement. The reason for this is, of course, the First Amendment, which prohibits the establishment of a state religion, and which allows the free exercise of religion.

European religious history shows that the presence of an established church does not in itself prevent the development of sectarian movements. One need look no further than the Reformation for evidence of this. At the same time, however, the presence of an established church often serves to discourage sectarianism and, even more so, cultism. There simply is not the spiritual room to move in a society with a state-mandated church. This room was created by the decision not to establish a church here, and was protected by the free exercise clause. Not only will Americans not be told what to believe, we will not be told what *not* to believe. The result has been a religious diversity unprecedented and unmatched in the rest of the great Atlantic culture.[6]

There has been a long series of outbursts of religious enthusiasm in this country. The first two of these, the Great Awakenings of 1740 and 1800, took place primarily within the Christian tradition, within the church for the First Great Awakening, and with sects in the process of

establishing themselves as churches in the Second Great Awakening. With the opening of the frontier following the Louisiana purchase in 1803, however, there came to be both the geographical and mental space for individuals to explore alternatives to the coastal/colonial culture. Thus we have the first of three periods of intense cult activity in the late 18th and early 19th century.

The cults of the early 19th century tended to be communally based, exploring not only new spiritual visions, but the whole fabric of the community within which this vision could be acted out. They tended to be a reaction against the still strongly Calvinistic bias of much of American culture, redefining work and the family as much as religion. The adherents of these groups were white and fairly evenly divided between the sexes, as they were in some of the more recent cults. They were not the privileged children of the middle class, however, and rather than leaving clearly defined roles in an established society, they were participating in a broader social movement of westward expansion and the shaping of national identity. The cults' followers were marginalized in the sense that they took the opportunities offered seriously.

These opportunities involved the creation of alternative societies, utopias, heavens on earth. Even when organized as separate, frequently defensive, enclaves as refuges for the saved, they were also perceived to be models for all. These communities were thus rooted in the deeply felt American need to create "the city on the hill." There were broader social and political issues involved than the salvation of any particular individual. The community as a whole was understood to be the means of working out God's will.

Three obvious examples of such groups are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming (Shakers), and the Oneida Perfectionists. All three of these groups, under the direction of charismatic leadership, radically redefined the family in light of their understanding of the nature of sexuality and its role in human life; all three relied on some form of communal labor; and all three groups experienced such high levels of tension with the surrounding community that it affected the nature of the experience of the members.

The Mormons were founded by Joseph Smith, who was granted both the founding revelation of the golden plates, and a continuing series of direct revelations from God guiding both their westward migration and their marriage practices. The former is significant because the Mormons understood it to be God's will that they move to "Lamanite"

(Indian) territory, far away from the constrictions of conventional society. The latter, involving polygamy, goaded the Gentiles into lynching Smith, and emphasized the need for the continuing move west. The Mormons succeeded in that move, due to the emergence of a second charismatic leader, Brigham Young, who took them to Utah, a remote spot where they could become firmly established before the rest of the country could, literally, catch up with them. Although the Mormons did not live communally in Utah, the communal labor and cooperation required to create and maintain an irrigation system in the desert functioned effectively the same way as a smaller, household-based communitarianism. In addition, the absence of non-Mormons in the community emphasized their interdependence. It was only at the end of the 19th century, with another revelation directing them to give up polygamy, that the Mormons began their concurrent move in the direction of acceptance, statehood, and church, rather than cult, status.

The Shakers understood the Second Coming to have occurred in the person of a woman, Mother Ann Lee. Thus, sexual activity, previously necessary to ensure the continuation of the human race in anticipation of this event, could be discontinued for the purer and more godly joys of celibacy. The Shakers lived and worked together in communal groups understood to be the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Their celibate lifestyle was clearly different from that of the surrounding community, but because this difference was perceived to be relatively benign and non-threatening, tension was maintained within manageable levels, and the continued existence of the group was possible.

This was not the case for the Perfectionists. John Humphrey Noyes, like Mother Ann, understood the Kingdom of God to be available in the here and now, and, like her, understood it to involve communal life and labor based on the model of Jesus and his apostles. The problem for the surrounding community was that Noyes understood this communal sharing to extend to all areas of life, including the family. In Noyes' community, each man was married to each woman. This practice outraged the surrounding community so much that no reduction in tension was possible as long as the practice continued. Unlike the Mormons, the Perfectionists lacked a divine mandate to escape; yet they were unwilling to compromise on this point. The community ultimately dissolved rather than give in.

We see, then, that the cults of the first phase tended to involve communal living separate from the larger society, possible because of

the physical and mental openness of the frontier period. Cult activity of the second phase, however, occurred in response to the closing of the frontier and the urbanization and industrialization of American life. This phase actually occurred in two separate stages: first, in the late 19th century, as whites confronted these changes, and then in the early 20th century when the black community adapted to life in the north after the mass migrations during and after the First World War.

White cult activity in the late 19th century tended to entail relatively low levels of involvement. Much of it operated at the level of audience and client cult (e.g., spiritualism). Even when it involved a fully developed cult movement, as it did with Christian Science and Theosophy, the groups did not tend to separate themselves as thoroughly as the cults of the first phase, i.e., they tended not to live communally. This may be related to the fact that most of these groups also tended not to be organized around a charismatic leader. Although both Christian Science and Theosophy had founders who shaped and guided the movements, these women — Mary Baker Eddy and Madame Blavatsky, respectively — were perceived by their followers as teachers rather than prophets. For this reason, although their teachings were compelling enough to demand primary religious commitment, they lacked the authority necessary for the redefinition of sex or work roles.

More relevant to our discussion is the black cult activity of the first half of the 20th century. These groups tended to develop very clearly and sometimes self-consciously in response to the social dislocation and increasing class division of the migrating black community, and, more broadly, to the social dispossession and marginality blacks experienced in a deeply racist society. Although they tended, with the exception of Father Divine's Peace Mission, not to organize themselves communally, they are similar to the cults of the first phase in a number of important ways.

First, they centered on a charismatic leader — Marcus Garvey, Father Divine, the Noble Drew Ali — who served as prophet as well as teacher. Second, the nature of prophecy involved a critique, however implicit, of the dominant white society, and a vision of the specific actions necessary to correct the wrongs done to the black race. For Marcus Garvey and the Noble Drew Ali, this involved a reclamation of their original heritage and a return to the ways or homeland of their ancestors. For Father Divine, this involved the denial of race.

In strong contrast to the white cults of this phase, the black leader and his or her vision demanded a fundamental reinterpretation

of the followers' experience in the past and in the future, and thus demanded far greater levels of involvement and commitment. The white cults of this phase provided teachings that soothed and fine-tuned the individual's adjustment to a changing society: the black cults challenged the individual and demanded a new way of being in the world in all aspects of life. This was not the case with all black cults, of course. Many, such as Daddy Grace's United House of Prayer for All People, maintained an essentially escapist posture, creating a safe enclave within the cult that did nothing to challenge the dominant culture and its values. These groups did not endure beyond the death of the charismatic leader, however, and did not have the same sort of extra-cult impact on the imagination of the larger black community.

The figures noted above had precisely this sort of broader impact. Marcus Garvey and his United Negro Improvement Association exposed the extent of black dispossession and dissatisfaction, and mobilized thousands with his call to return to Africa. Perhaps more important was the economic and political component of his vision, calling for black self-sufficiency and self-respect. He served, as Malcolm X would a generation later, to expose the depths of black alienation to a white society blind to its own racism. His vision would resurface again and again in black religious, cultural, and political groups.

The Noble Drew Ali of the Moorish Science Temple was the first to critique Christianity as the white man's religion and to reject it as an ideological means of oppression. His legacy was institutionalized primarily through the Black Muslims, but his message was heard beyond the limits of those who chose to act on it.

Father Divine's Peace Mission differed from these other two groups in that his critique of the dominant society was implicit rather than explicit, but his target was effectively the same: American racism. His response was not to encourage black pride and knowledge of black traditions, but instead to deny that blacks existed as a separate race. In some ways, however, his plan of action was far more radical. Of all black cult leaders of this period, he was virtually the only one who advocated communal life and labor for his followers. In addition, his following, alone among the cults of that time, included both blacks and whites, which had the potential to lead to extreme levels of tension with the larger society. Communalism is inherently threatening to American society and its interconnected myths of rugged individualism and the nuclear family. Father Divine's interracial communal group would have been utterly unacceptable during this period between the two wars

had not he made effectively the same defensive move that Mother Ann Lee made so many years before: he made residence in heaven conditional upon celibacy.[7]

Much has been made of Jim Jones' "borrowing" from Father Divine. His visits to the Peace Mission are seen as being calculated efforts to study the master in order to appropriate his techniques and his followers. This portrayal of Jones is actually about the ongoing efforts to discount his legitimacy by implying that he couldn't even come up with his own cult without ripping off his predecessors. When it comes right down to it, though, what did he steal from Father Divine? Jones' own interracial congregation predates any visit to Philadelphia. Communal life and labor, and the practice of calling the leader Father or Mother, did not originate with either Jones or Divine. These were practices common to a large number of groups dating back to the late 18th century.[8] The Peace Mission provided Jim Jones with the opportunity to see one of the great classic American cults in action with a still-living leader. He could have just as easily borrowed the techniques from any one of dozens of other groups, or reinvented them for himself. I cannot see anything sinister or telling in that visit.

*

The third phase of intense cult activity in this country occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is the period in which the Peoples Temple belongs chronologically, although the fit is less satisfactory in other ways. During this phase, the cults in question came to be called "new religions." This shift in terminology was due to the large number of social scientists studying these groups, who found the word "cult" so devalued through imprecise usage and so loaded with negative connotations as to be virtually useless as a technical term.[9] Fortuitously, however, the change in terminology reflected a concomitant change in the nature of cults, both in terms of their target audiences and in terms of their teachings.

As with the earlier periods of heightened cult activity, the new religions emerged during a time of tremendous social change. Unlike the previous phases, however, the members of the new religions were self-marginalized. They were white, middle class, and educated; they had, at least in the eyes of their parents, turned their backs on their ordained place in respectable society. This contrasts most sharply with the clientele of the second phase, first white women, then blacks of both

sexes, who were not only already marginalized, but who felt the nature of their marginalized roles shifting under their feet. For them, the cults provided a way of making sense of the new circumstances of their experience and a refuge from a changing world.

There were other differences between the phase three cults and their predecessors as well. As previously noted, the phase one cults tended to emphasize heavens on earth, where members created communal societies as models for the world or as sanctuaries for believers. Although this social emphasis is not as clear in the second phase, which tended not to involve communally organized groups, it is evident in Garvey's, Ali's, and Divine's movements.

The new religions, by contrast, were inward-looking, appealing to the individual as individual and not as member of society. Rather than taking as their starting point the various social movements of the 1960s — the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the anti-war movement — most of them sprang from the secondary element of the counter-culture of the 1960s, the drug culture. Many, though certainly not all, of the new religions offered as their primary appeal the opportunity to reach new levels of consciousness through meditation instead of drugs. We see this especially clearly with the Krishnas, the Divine Light Mission, and Transcendental Meditation. Scientology should be included with these Eastern-based movements, for though it came from the mind of L. Ron Hubbard, and not from any traditional eastern religion, it functioned in much the same sort of way with its talk of reincarnation and its emphasis on improved mental health through the clearing of engrams.

Actually, these new religions, with their emphasis on the individual and on individual states of consciousness, functioned almost more as client cults (which is, in fact, how two of these groups, TM and Scientology, began) than as cult movements, despite the expansion of the claims into a comprehensive worldview, and the organization of the followers into congregations who make the group their primary religious commitment. The various lifestyle changes involved — dress, vegetarianism, communal living — are directed to enhance the conditions under which the individual, and not society, is to be transformed. In this way, the new religions are more similar to the late 19th century cults among the urban white.

This is an important point because it marks a continuing development in the history of cults in America. No longer was complete communal withdrawal really practical: the most that could be hoped for

was improved adjustment to a society already in place. What is signifi-
cant with the new religions is that the individuals who were seeking that
adjustment were white, middle-class young adults, who would seem to
have an assured space in the established order. The nature of their
rebellion, though apparently radical, was in some ways very conserva-
tive: the new religions both emerged from and reacted against the
counter-culture. Having rejected the sex-drugs-and-rock-and-roll ex-
cesses of the counter-culture, they continued to participate in its rejec-
tion of bourgeois culture, and sought alternatives to provide the disci-
pline and structure lacking in the counter-culture without returning to
suburbia. These alternatives were provided by the new religions with
their various lifestyle demands, primarily in the area of sexuality and
the family. Most of these groups created clear and strong norms in this
area: celibacy, marital sex for procreation only, arranged marriages,
and so on. The new religionists perceived that the sexual freedom of the
1960s did not work for them — but they also saw that the nuclear family
as practiced in the middle class did not work either. They made the new
religion the basis of their family life, though the emphasis remained, to
a large degree, on the fulfillment of the individual.

The clearest exception to these generalizations is the Unifica-
tion Church. Their motto, "World peace through ideal families," indi-
cates their understanding that the role of the family is fundamental to
the goal of world transformation. They are unusual, also, in their
political emphasis, a virulent anti-communism which should be attrib-
uted to Rev. Moon's experiences in Korea. Because their target audience
in the United States was white and middle class, however, they should
be included among the new religions.

Peoples Temple should not be so included, however. It was so
anomalous that it should be considered a classic cult. It can be distin-
guished from the new religions on four basic points: its origins, its
membership, its goals, and its organization. In each of these areas the
Temple is much closer to the cults of phase one and the black cults of
phase two than it is to any new religion.

Its origins, unlike most of the new religions, were to be found in
existent Christian traditions in American life, namely Pentecostalism.
The only new religion to come so directly out of Christianity was the
Children of God. The Temple began as a sectarian movement, taking the
holiness themes of Pentecostalism and adding the social consciousness
of liberal Protestantism. The move from sect to cult was marked by the
changes in the nature of the gifts claimed by Jim Jones. Pentecostalism

is a charismatic movement, and the gifts of prophecy and healing, which Jones professed to have, are standard within that tradition. Jones expanded the nature of both of these gifts, however, to the extent that the Temple became sectarian to Pentecostalism, which is itself a sect. Rather than merely prophesying with regard to the individual, or more general but still religious prophesies, Jones began to make much larger and more political predictions. His vision of the imminence of nuclear war cannot be considered a standard Pentecostal prophecy; nor can his warnings and criticisms of the racism and militarism of American society. Similarly, when he moved beyond the healing of individuals, both genuine and contrived, to speak of the healing of families and of society as a whole, he was expanding and transforming the traditional Pentecostal understanding of healing. It was later, with Jones' talk of reincarnation, and with his monopolization of the charismatic gifts, that the movement from sect to cult becomes complete.

The membership of the Temple involved two separate but connected groups. The majority was the dispossessed: urban blacks and lower-class whites. A small elite was white, middle class, and educated. The implications of this dual membership, a cult and new religion, were profound.[10] For the purpose of this discussion, however, we will focus on the Temple as cult, since it reflects the experience of the majority of its membership, and since it represents the kernel of its history, the addition of the new religion/elite elements being a later development. The dispossessed members were not individuals who, having dabbled in the counter-culture and found it lacking, turned to a new religion; rather, they were individuals who found the counter-culture and the changes it was wreaking merely added to the dislocation they felt on the margins of society. They were attracted to a group which partook of the forms and energy of the civil rights movement, but which also provided an expanded perspective on events and the charismatic protection of its leader. The affiliation with the Disciples of Christ gave the Temple an immediate legitimacy, although it quickly became clear to those who became involved that this was not just another Christian church.[11]

The goals of the Temple were not limited to the health and well-being of the individual, but rather included a broader vision of American society and an agenda for dealing with its flaws and unfairness. Almost from its beginning, the Temple provided social services to members and provided a refuge from the coldness of the larger society, even while efforts at social reform were undertaken, e.g., through participating in the electoral process. This is similar to the strategy of Father Divine,

with his dual emphasis on the provision of services to members and their active participation as "good citizens." Later, when it became clear to Temple members that these reforms would not be sufficient (a clear echo of the Garveyite rejection of American society), the systematic withdrawal from American society began, culminating in the hegira to Guyana. Thus the Temple's social and political vision is in marked contrast to the far more privatistic orientations of most of the new religions, and more closely parallels the cults of the first phase, with their creations of separate, uncorrupted communities, as well as the activist black cults of the second phase.

The withdrawal and hegira were possible because of the institutional basis of Temple life, a systematic form of communalism. Although many of the new religions live communally, the individual households are more apt to be geographically widespread, with relatively little interdependence among them. The Temple, by keeping its geographical focus small, first in Redwood Valley and then in San Francisco, kept the overall membership in regular communication. The result was a far more tightly knit community than is to be found in most of the new religions.[12] The move to Guyana, however, is what most definitively marks the difference: it was only by leaving the country that the Temple was able to create the kind of self-contained community typical of the cults of the first phase.

*

The Temple, therefore, should not be compared with the new religions as much as with the cults of the first phase and the activist black cults of the second phase. This is the historical context which was not seen in the first rush to explain the suicides. Instead, because of the eagerness of the anti-cult movement to claim Jonestown, the Temple was indiscriminately lumped in with the new religions. Indeed, the complicity of the Concerned Relatives (parents and ex-members who lobbied for the return of relatives who belonged to Peoples Temple) was an important factor in this categorization. The members of the Concerned Relatives were white, middle class, and educated: precisely the social strata from which the new religions drew their recruits. Whether defectors or families, the Concerned Relatives described the experience of the elite, the members of the new religion within the Temple. Their affiliation with the ACM thus made a certain sense. The problem was,

as John Hall so astutely points out, that the interference of the Concerned Relatives may well have been a significant factor in the ultimate fate of the Temple.[13]

The Temple was a classic American cult, organized around a charismatic leader, offering an alternative social and political vision, living communally, and addressing itself to the dispossessed of society. The decision to self-destruct rather than compromise is a decision which other such groups have faced: it is unusual only in the form in which that self-destruction occurred. The Oneida community decided to dissolve the community — the Temple decided to destroy it. The suicides mark the most extreme example of the tension that exists between a cult and the society in which it is found.

Notes

1. I discuss this at length in Judith M. Weightman, *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), Chapter 5, "Reactions."

2. See Anson D. Shupe, Jr., and David G. Bromley, *The New Vigilantes* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980), especially Chapter 4.

3. Ibid., Chapter 8.

4. Ibid.

5. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Chapter 2.

6. Obviously this comparison is limited to American and European culture. The relevance of Stark and Bainbridge's work to non-western cultures has been extensively debated.

7. It is interesting to note that of these three, only Father Divine continued to operate beyond the 1920s: Garvey was deported and Ali assassinated. Father Divine certainly had his share of legal problems — he was banned from New York, his first power base and headquarters — but the authorities could not banish him completely.

8. The Shakers came to the United States shortly after the War of Independence.

9. The fact that it is only with the third phase that there was a large body of social scientists hungry for research subjects may well have influenced the trajectories of many of these groups. The study, most importantly including participant observation, to which they have been subjected is in marked contrast to the isc'ation which earlier groups were able to maintain despite the visits of curious outsiders. Toward the end of the second phase we do have some early social-scientific efforts at description and even analysis, most importantly by Arthur Huff Fauset (*Black Gods of the Metropolis*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944/1971). The mutual impact of

scholar and subject is particularly significant with the Unification Church, which has actively courted academics in order to achieve respectability — i.e, to reduce tension and move in a more church-like direction.

10. Weightman, op. cit.

11. See ibid., Chapter 2, for a discussion of the appeals and the commitment process.

12. The only close parallel is ISKCON after the New Vrindaban schism. There has been word recently, however, that the West Virginia contingent is planning to expand up to the Pennsylvania/ New Jersey area.

13. John R. Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1987), Chapter 10.

Jonestown and the Scientific Study of Religion

Barbara J. W. Hargrove

Even ten years after the mass suicide of members of the Peoples Temple at their agricultural colony in Guyana, sociologists and others concerned with the scientific study of religion are unsure how to treat the phenomenon of Jonestown. We have become aware that this is far from the first religious mass suicide in human history. While Hall (1981: 171-172) notes that the most frequently cited incident, that of the Jews at Masada in 73 A.D., was after all merely a choice to die at their own hands rather than those of the Roman soldiers who were besieging them, it is less clear that certain death from outside the community threatened the several groups of Russian Old Believers who set their towns on fire and perished in them rather than submit to Nikonian reforms in Russian orthodoxy (Robbins, 1987).

In these two cases, however, and in most other known incidents of religious mass suicide, the groups that ended their lives *en masse* were conservative, responding to threats against a cherished and traditional way of life. Could one characterize the quite new experiment of Jonestown with such groups? If not, what classification could be used to begin to explain this phenomenon?

There is little confusion about classification within the anti-cult movement, where Jonestown is held up as the ultimate example of the fearsome danger of "cults." But from a sociological perspective, given a rather wide variety of classes of religious groups, the one category which Jonestown seems *not* to fit is that of the "cult." In the usual tripartite classification of classical sociology of religion, the term *church* is reserved for religious groups that both support and are supported by the

society in which they are imbedded. In the religious patterns of the United States, that category of established church is occupied by not one but by a fairly wide span of religious choices in the forms of denominations. American freedom of choice as a basic value is supported with the assumption that anyone is free to choose among these denominations, which in recent decades have included Catholicism and Judaism. As an affiliate of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, the Peoples Temple can be understood to fit within that churchly category.

The *sect*, on the other hand, is understood to be in some tension with both the host society and its established religion. Classification of sects on the basis of their social organization emphasizes their strict boundary maintenance and generally authoritarian discipline. Stark and Bainbridge's classification (1985: 25) is based on an understanding of the sect as a schismatic movement, one based on the teaching of a church group or that of an already extant sect. It presents itself as going back to a purer form of the given religion, from which the more acceptable church body has strayed. Peoples Temple was problematic in its demand for commitment and high boundary maintenance. And given Christian teachings about brotherly love and service, and the picture given in scripture about the coming together of the early church where all people shared their goods with one another (Acts 4: 32-35), Peoples Temple's crusade against racism and communal pattern could certainly be defined as a call for the churches to return to an original purity. On both counts, Peoples Temple qualified as a sect.

By contrast, definitions of *cult* based on social organization have tended to fit the subcategory of the client cult as defined by Stark and Bainbridge (1985: 28-29). These have very open boundaries and a loose organizational form, and do not then fit the Peoples Temple. The more general definition of cult given by Stark and Bainbridge as a form of religion that offers some innovation to a society's religious milieu, would fit the Peoples Temple only if one were to understand its growing Marxism as such an innovation. This understanding can be questioned, however, both because Marxist ideas are not really new in American society, and because current advocates of liberation theology are applying them to Christianity in the literature and theological education institutions of the denominations. It may be said that innovation was obvious in Jones' increasing claims to be divine himself, but that seems to have been more the product of passionate oratory than any systematic teaching of the group.

To the sociologist, then, the Peoples Temple has only tenuous

claims to be a cult. Instead, it is most nearly a sectarian movement, and best understood through the literature regarding sects. In perhaps one of the best analyses of this group, Hall (1981) describes Peoples Temple as an apocalyptic sect, "caught in the saddle of the apocalypse" (p. 173), between a pre-apocalyptic hope and conflict, and a post-apocalyptic otherworldly grace. That is, like many contemporary sectarians, they saw the society growing more corrupt and threatening, and set themselves in opposition to it; on the other hand, with the establishment of the Agricultural Project in Guyana, they were attempting to establish an outpost of the millennial kingdom on earth. Was it this "caughtness" that led to death? And if so, what led to the ambiguity of the movement? The best place to begin an examination of this issue may be in the composition of the people recruited to the Peoples Temple.

Membership: the "DNB" Thesis

Gussner and Berkowitz (1988: 137-138) have created a useful compilation of the dominant theories explaining the rise of new religious movements, which they call the "DNB thesis." They say:

> Although there are differences in emphases in the literature, the "D" element refers to some form of social or psychological disintegration — either decline in the perceived legitimacy of cultural symbol systems, social disaffiliation, or disruptive structural impact that vitiate the effectiveness of enculturating institutions. The "N" element refers variously to the personal neediness of joiners, either for an alternative family, for integration of a countercultural ethic with less expressive ones, or simply need for love, security, self-esteem, etc. The "B" element refers to community belongingness, either as explicit communalism or more generalized modes of belonging. The central thrust of this model, then, is that social disruption leads to disaffiliation and personality disturbance, which joiners attempt to overcome by belonging to a supportive community.

While they make a good case for the contention that this "DNB thesis" does not hold well for the Eastern meditative groups they study,

it seems quite applicable to the Jonestown situation, particularly when expanded to include Glock's types of deprivation as another "D" factor. He distinguishes five types of deprivation that when experienced by people may push them to join or create new religious groups: economic, social, organismic, ethical, and psychic deprivation. Economic deprivation has become the most common factor noted by such scholars as Niebuhr (1929) as a source of sect formation. The concept of social deprivation takes note of the fact that in our society, even people who have sufficient money may be held back from respect and appreciation by factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, appearance, or style of life. Organismic deprivation refers to physical or mental illness or handicapping conditions. Ethical deprivation results from value conflicts between persons and the society, or as Glock put it, "an inability to lead their lives according to their own lights." Finally, psychic deprivation occurs when people cannot find a meaningful set of values by which to order their lives. It may arise in times and places of great social stress or change, when a condition of *anomie* exists in the social order. Or it may be the result of the particular situation of persons suffering from other sorts of deprivation, causing them to "lose any stake in, and commitment to, existing values" (Glock, 1973: 210-212; quotations from p. 212).

In applying such an approach, one also needs to acknowledge that membership in the Peoples Temple was drawn from at least two very divergent populations. The first of those populations, which formed a minority of Peoples Temple membership but which exercised power in the organization considerably beyond its comparative size, was composed of persons of upper middle-class background. In Glock's term, the primary deprivation felt by this group was of the ethical type, though psychic deprivation may have played a hand. Persons suffering ethical deprivation are generally understood to be "majority" members of society, expected to be its exemplars and leaders, or at least its privileged beneficiaries. It is here that other segments of Gussner and Berkowitz's "D" element appear. For those suffering ethical deprivation, there has indeed been "a decline in the perceived legitimacy of cultural symbol systems." For them, there are elements in the culture that elicit shame or dismay. The founding of the Peoples Temple in Indiana occurred just before the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* which identified the racism of many American educational systems, and the Temple's development to some extent paralleled in time the black civil rights movement. Surely the growing awareness of

racism in the society was a cause of ethical unease among many sensitive members of the privileged white majority, and Peoples Temple was from its inception dedicated to the eradication of racism.

In addition, the move of the Peoples Temple to California coincided closely with the rise of the countercultural movement there. Again, the critiques of society levelled by that movement were centered among more privileged groups — college students or dropouts from the mainstream of the society, who were on the outside from choice, not through the circumstances of their lives.

Finally, the Peoples Temple came to public notice in the midst of the bifurcated policies of Lyndon Johnson's administration, which on the one hand declared war on poverty and brought to attention the plight of the poor, and on the other insisted on pursuing an unpopular war in Vietnam. Caught between a growing sensitivity to issues of poverty and resistance to a war that put the poor and minorities at greatest risk, upper middle-class people had reason to experience ethical deprivation, and were also subject to contradictory influences that might well create psychic tension.

It is here that the denominational status of Peoples Temple may have become an important feature. The 1960s were a period of some religious ferment in mainline churches, as they attempted to respond to some of the social anomalies of the time in the tradition of the Social Gospel (see, e.g., Schaller, 1979). Peoples Temple at that time could have been perceived simply as one of the most effective churches in that contingent. Rebecca Moore (1985), for example, makes a good case that her sisters, who died at Jonestown, were trying through their activity with Peoples Temple to act upon values they had learned at home from their Methodist minister father. Indeed, one Peoples Temple promotional brochure contained the following statement by Dr. Moore:

> Peoples Temple is a caring community of people of all races and classes. They bear the mark of compassion and justice — compassion for the hungry and jobless, lonely and disturbed, and also for the earth and her offspring. (Moore, 1985: 132)

While there was tension over unauthorized use of some of Moore's comments about the group, the content of the statement was not denied. In a letter to him, his daughter Annie, the second to join the Temple, gave a clear description of her joining in response to ethical deprivation:

The reason that the Temple is great is not just because
Jim Jones can make people cough up cancers, but be-
cause there is the largest group of people I have ever
seen who are concerned about the world and are fight-
ing for truth and justice for the world. And all the people
have come from such different backgrounds, every
color, every age, every income group, and they have
turned into constructive people from being dopers and
thieves and being greedy, wanting lots of money and
having 'things.' So anyway it's the only place I have seen
true Christianity being practiced (Moore, 1985: 93).

Peoples Temple, as this indicates, went further than most other
churches in acting out Christian principles of service to others, for it did
not just serve the poor and minority people as clients, but welcomed
them as members. So rare a demonstration of high Christian values of
the community of believers must certainly have attracted persons suf-
fering from ethical deprivation.

Those other members of the Peoples Temple, the poor and those
left out of the mainstream of American life, offer a different pattern of
attraction to the movement. For them, the "D" factor operated quite
directly. Their lives were spent in a constant state of disorganization, in
the disorder common to ghetto areas of inner cities. Lists published in
the newspapers at the time of the mass suicide that indicated the place
of origin showed a preponderance of addresses from the deep South. It
takes no stretch of the imagination to understand that most of those
people had grown up in places and at a time where education for blacks
was minimal, certainly insufficient to prepare them to be economically
competitive in a California urban environment. And while California
society may have seemed more open than that of the Alabama or
Mississippi they had left behind, it still reflected the generic racism of
American society. In Glock's terms, they clearly suffered from both
economic and social deprivation, and the kinds of confusion common to
their lives are likely to exert psychic pressures as well. In addition,
many suffered physical illnesses, and Jones gained early notoriety by
performing faith healings. Their neediness was evident, and easily
expressed. Not only was belongingness important, it also involved the
need to belong to an organization that offered both economic support and
order for their lives.

Leadership and Response:
A Social-Psychological Dynamic

If the previous discussion has established the neediness of both types of members, it leads naturally to the problem of a leader striving to meet those needs. It is here that the person of Jim Jones comes into focus, and it is necessary to understand his performance as the leader of the Peoples Temple.

In the early days in California, meeting the economic needs of the poor was perhaps the easiest task. The War on Poverty had found in the churches a channel for the distribution of money to the poor that had some hope of bypassing political organizations often dominated by powerful interests, who were perceived to be deliberate blocks in the attempt to equalize society. As a congregation of a mainline denomination, Peoples Temple had access to federal funds, and they also set up various channels to local funding agencies (Hall, 1981). One of its early projects in California was the setting up of group homes for the elderly. Later they applied a similar process to house juveniles. These were supported partly with the pooling of Social Security checks, partly with welfare funds, and partly with special grants. The Temple provided food for the hungry and collected clothing in ways common to many churches. They seemed quite successful in meeting the basic economic needs of their people.

However, with the advent of the Nixon Administration in 1969, funds for the War on Poverty began to dry up, so that even this easiest form of meeting needs became more difficult. Economic pressure was added to the psychic need for order and the need for status, particularly on the part of poor black members who formed the majority of the congregation. Some of the political power of the organization was beginning to be questioned, so that some routes to support for their programs were cut off. The collapse of many aspects of the counterculture also eroded the optimism of many of the upper middle-class members at a time when their inability to continue to solicit grants and funds was undermining their perceived status. Disorder was beginning to cloud their lives as well. So everyone tended to turn more and more to Jones, casting him, consciously or unconsciously, in the role of a messiah.

There is no evidence that Jones resisted such a designation. Indeed, just the opposite seems to be true. From an early age, he had apparently perceived himself as an unloved outsider. He seems to have

developed a passion for social justice based on a very alienated view of the society. No agency of the society seemed to him to share his concern, not even the churches. In fact, as a young man he had left a Methodist pastorate when his congregation resisted the inclusion of blacks in their midst (Moore, 1985: 151). Given what he perceived in his social world, little justice existed, and he found it difficult if not impossible then to believe in a just God. He appears to have perceived himself as the only person who really cared. If there were a just God, that god must be Jim Jones.

That conviction of a sort of divine calling is important to the development of the charismatic prophet, and often makes its possessor a powerful attractor. Jones' ability to organize and lead his congregation in Indiana, and to have a significant number of them follow him to California, gives some indication of his ability to inspire devotion.

Charisma is not just a personal characteristic. It is found in the interaction between a dynamic leader and a following that responds to that dynamism. Religious worship often is structured to enhance the charismatic relationship between a religious leader and his or her followers. A combination of participatory music, prayer in which the leader acts as an intermediary between the congregation and the divine, and preaching that is expected to inspire provides a potent preparation of the situation for the enhancement of charisma. That has been particularly true in traditional black worship services, where sermons often become antiphonal, an exchange between preacher and congregation, which constantly heightens the power of the message. Thus to attend such a worship service is to put oneself in a position to feel charismatic influence from the preacher.

However, worship services are only the tip of the iceberg of charismatic influence that can be created in the relationship between a religious leader and his or her following. If the people have accepted the charismatic power of the leader, they are likely to expect prophetic performance, if not in physical miracles, then at least in the ability to create a new order out of the disorder of their lives. If, as we have seen to be the case in the later years of the Peoples Temple, that new order seems threatened, greater and more unrealistic demands are likely to be made on the leader. Authority must be demonstrated; charismatic credentials must be validated. As Weber, in his seminal work on charismatic leadership, has stated:

> If proof of his charismatic qualification fails him for
> long, the leader endowed with charisma tends to think
> his god or his magical or heroic powers have deserted
> him. If he is for long unsuccessful, above all if his
> leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that
> his charismatic authority will disappear (1968: 51-52).

The concept of charisma has been popularized in ways that have
robbed it of much of its original meaning, but as first put forward by
Weber, it involves a great deal of power. And while a wide variety of
people have been called "charismatic" lately, Jones and his organization
seem to fit with Weber's original concept.

Freund, summarizing some of Weber's thought on this man-
ner, has written:

> The influence of the charismatic leader is proportion-
> ately greater as he places himself outside any political
> grouping, despises the powers that be and tears men
> from the routine and boredom of everyday life by exalting
> the irrational aspects of life. A charismatic policy is
> thus an adventure, not only because it courts failure, but
> also because it is constantly obliged to discover new
> impetus, to provide new motives for enthusiasm to con-
> firm its power (1968: 233).

The organizational form of Peoples Temple fit Weber's description: "The
corporate group which is subject to charismatic authority is based on an
emotional form of communal relationship" (Weber, 1968: 50). Again,
and here Weber combines his understanding of charismatic leadership
in general with the particularly religious category of prophet (see Long,
1986, on this issue):

> The genuine prophet, like the genuine military leader
> and every true leader in this sense, preaches, creates, or
> demands new obligations. In the pure type of charisma,
> these are imposed on the authority of revelation by or-
> acles, or of the leader's own will, and are recognized by
> the members of the religious, military, or party group,
> because they come from such a source. Recognition is a
> duty (Weber, 1968: 51).

The particular importance of this concept to the current discussion is the clear indication in Weber's work that charismatic organization, and charismatic authority, are inherently unstable, and that such authority is not simply a personal characteristic but the result of a group process. Thus, while it would be foolish to deny tendencies toward psychological instability in Jones' personality, the excesses of his behavior in the later days of Peoples Temple were almost certainly, at least in part, a creation of his followers — of their need to have him defend them from the encroachments of an increasingly hostile world, to enhance their sense of participation in the fellowship and its ability to transcend all threats.

Of primary importance, of course, was that sense of hostility from the outside. It is fairly clear from his history that Jones suffered symptoms of paranoia. Yet early in the development of Peoples Temple there was optimism about the ability of the group to turn around some of the negative aspects of the society, as they were able to make use of various agencies of the society to further their programs. They were able to exercise considerable political power in San Francisco, with a large constituency whose votes could be delivered in support or opposition to any policy or candidate. But Jones' personal alienation was always present; he could use outside sources for his program, but not dilute his mission in cooperative efforts with others. At times there was the hope of creating the Kingdom of God right there in Peoples Temple; but always there were checks and blocks on that hope, and so was a growing conviction that outside forces were the embodiment of evil, conspiring against them.

This became a factor in the descending spiral of responses of the group. Pressures on Jones to prove himself a messianic leader encouraged behavior that was less and less acceptable in the outside world, creating defections and demands for some kind of investigation and supervision of the group. This, added to the reduction of support from outside sources, threatened Temple programs, eliciting a paranoia that saw outside forces deliberately conspiring to destroy the movement.

Hans Toch has discussed the importance to social movements of such conspiracy theories. He says, "such beliefs tend to come into being at the intersection of self-regard and defeat; the urgency of the need to preserve one's self-image must be combined with the bitterness of experienced failure" (p. 63). Again, and this seems crucial for Peoples Temple, he says, "The function of a conspiracy-oriented movement is not to do battle with conspiratorial forces, but to provide reassurance and

security to its own members" (p. 69). Finally, Toch claims:

> Conspiracy beliefs respond to a real need *only* for *persons who cannot preserve their self-esteem unless they conceive of themselves as victims of a plot* (p. 69).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper, it would be interesting to investigate the dynamics of some of the higher level members of the Peoples Temple in the light of Toch's statement. Did they have more resources for self-esteem than other members, so that they were in less need of conspiracy theories? Many of those suspicions of the outside world seem to have been shared by the leadership contingent, but it is also true that the best-known defectors came from this segment of the movement (see, e.g. Richardson, 1980: 242). Surely the leaders enjoyed much higher status in the outside world than the majority of the members, whose race and poverty worked against self-esteem.

Toch does not examine the use of conspiracy theory to enhance the power of leadership, though it is implied. If there are conspiracies threatening the group, the leader may be perceived as the only hope of resisting them. Persons bearing leadership under such circumstances may find it easy to believe in the conspiracy because it expands their power in the movement. This is not to say that Jones or those in the leadership contingent of Peoples Temple deliberately developed a conspiracy theory to enhance their power, though that could have happened. However, we all have a tendency to believe that which advances our status or self-perception. The idea of conspiracy would be natural to Jones, who seems to have from an early age perceived much of the outside world as inimical. An ideology that strengthened his hand was simply a reflection of his own view.

At the same time, as the saying goes, "Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean that someone's *not* out to get you." Peoples Temple had enemies. Its very ability to mobilize political power in the San Francisco Bay Area also created political enemies. And in the wings was another more general movement that would have had to be considered inimical. By the late 1970s the anti-cult movement had gained a good deal of strength. This movement, begun among families resisting their children's involvement in the Children of God, began in California and came to target all innovative religious groups, particularly those that demanded a strong commitment among their members. Anti-cult

forces had had considerable success in obtaining from the courts conservatorships that allowed them to remove members from "cults" in order to attempt to bring them to their senses, often with the use of forceful "deprogramming." Public opinion against "cults" was quite high. The more Peoples Temple moved into innovative practices, the more it was subject to labeling as a "cult." And there was a recognizable anti-cult movement arrayed in opposition.

In addition, some defectors sought to expose disapproved practices, and eventually worked with relatives and political opponents to organize campaigns against the Temple. They succeeded in stimulating the publishing of an expose that speeded the departure of the larger contingent of Peoples Temple to Guyana before the agricultural colony was prepared for them, which may have become a factor later in the grisly end of the experiment.

Probably the primary force of the conspiracy theory, however, came from the element referred to by Toch, the provision of reassurance and security within the movement. People who had found a home and a purpose in Peoples Temple would not find a similar interracial, interclass community anywhere else that they knew of. Peoples Temple was unique, and many of its members remained committed to the alternative it offered. They turned to Jones to keep the walls high enough around them that their community could not be invaded by hostile forces, and seldom noticed that those same walls were holding them in as well.

Issues of Survival, Ideology and Organization

James Richardson, in his presidential address to the Association for the Sociology of Religion in 1986, discussed his development as a scholar concerned with new religious movements. He said:

Initially I might have assigned a pre-eminent position to beliefs or theology, and assumed that group actions were simply acting out theology. But I became aware that the relationship was often *just the reverse*. The group was acting in ways to maximize chances of survival, and the group's theology or ideology was often *developed* or *modified* in ways that were after-the-fact *justification* of what group members and leaders had decided was essential for material reasons (Richardson, 1988, forthcoming).

This dynamic appears in the history of Peoples Temple. For example, while Jones had long had a love-hate relationship with Christianity and a powerful ambivalence about the existence and/or nature of God, during its earlier period in California Peoples Temple presented — and probably understood — itself as a mainline Christian church. One factor in survival is the attraction of members, and people joined a *church* which offered services in an evangelical style but which engaged in an unusual amount of social service. Its churchly nature attracted people who were poor and relatively well-off, who were black and white — not just poor blacks and affluent whites, but both classes of both races. What this church was *not*, and this became crucial, was the legitimator of some "lifestyle enclave" (as Bellah, et al., 1986 have described modern urban Americans' alternatives to real community).

As a church, Peoples Temple was able to participate in the political and economic structures of the city. Such participation was another factor of organizational survival. The Temple fit closely in the description of the economic structure of a charismatic organization developed by Weber:

> Pure charisma is specifically foreign to economic considerations.... What is deplored, so long as the genuinely charismatic type is adhered to, is traditional or rational every-day economizing, the attainment of a regular income by continuous economic activity devoted to this end. Support by gifts, sometimes on a grand scale involving foundations, even by bribery and grand-scale honoraria, or by begging, constitute the strictly voluntary type of support (Weber, 1968: 51-52).

Being part of the perceived mainstream, the Temple put itself in line for many of these types of grants and gifts, and at the same time it asked of its people the kind of total commitment of themselves and their resources more characteristic of the sect.

However, there had long been elements there of communism, not only of the kind attributed to the primitive Christian church, but also of the Marxist variety. As Jones considered his need to move his people away from an increasingly hostile environment, he assumed that their attempt at communal living would be more welcome in a Marxist society. Thus organizational survival was fostered by turning to a more Marxist ideology which would more likely make the group seem com-

patible with such a host country. His first attempt to find such a refuge was in Cuba, but his group was not made welcome there. Guyana was known as a country that welcomed groups seeking communal living, and it was to Guyana that they came.

Organizational survival in the face of a conspiracy of enemies was pursued by removal of the group to another country, one where it was assumed that the organization might not only find welcome but perhaps exercise some influence. Ideological survival seemed more likely in a host country with a socialist bent, which should be supportive of their communal experiment.

Once the people had moved to the agricultural colony, however, one threat to the organization apparently was a continuing demand for miracles from the charismatic leader. While the colony was building homes and opening up areas for agriculture, that kind of process is long and requires a good deal of privation while it is being accomplished. This was exacerbated by the premature arrival of the main contingent of the organization before the place was ready for them. And while many of the people seemed to have been delighted with the change of scene from the inner city, there is nothing to indicate that Jones had ever shared in some of the agrarian ideology that has undergirded many rural communes. The move seems to have been designed to escape conspiratorial enemies much more than to establish an agrarian Eden. If his people grew impatient waiting for Eden to bloom, he was probably less prepared to deal with that concern than with many others they may have had. Thus the pressure on him was increased, and with it the sense of paranoia, which he then communicated to his followers.

The arrival of Congressman Ryan and his investigating party culminated a long and fairly broad campaign undertaken against Peoples Temple by those who opposed its policies and practices, were concerned about family members involved, or sought proof of the misappropriation of funds such as members' Social Security checks. The "conspiracy" had invaded their new home, and the organization was in danger. Even more in danger was the charismatic leadership of Jones, since charisma must constantly provide proof of its power, and he had not been able to keep this invasion from happening.

If the forces opposed to Peoples Temple had been able to bring charges against Jones, they probably would have so undercut both the ideological and the economic base of the organization that it would not have survived. For those who had totally committed themselves to the group, the survival of their self-image, their very identity, was threat-

ened. They had burned their bridges; there was no alternative to Peoples Temple. For many, to go back to the ghetto, to unsafe streets, disorder, and loss of a place in society, was worse than death. For others who may have had more to return to in the society's understanding, to go back would be to be labeled deviant, perhaps to be made subject to extreme psychological pressure, perhaps to be prosecuted as illegal exploiters of other members. To most, it meant the death of the dream to which they had dedicated their lives. To choose physical death over this loss of meaning and purpose may not have seemed difficult, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mark 8:36).

So for Jones' charismatic authority to be maintained, and for the ideological survival of the Peoples Temple, the organization had to die.

Conclusion

A number of insights from the scientific study of religion can be applied to the phenomenon of Jonestown, many of which might have put up some warning signals. But it was only the combination of them that created the unanticipated result. Peoples Temple was a unique movement in its endeavor to overcome in its membership many of the patterns of racial and class distinction that are endemic in American society. In order to do this, it required a leader with charismatic authority, who could make the break with inherited patterns through the power of his personality, who could say, "You have heard it said... but I say unto you." The natural instability of charismatic authority was overcome to some extent by providing a sense in the group that there were outside forces hostile to them and conspiring against them. The group altered some of its ideology, or at least the public presentation of it, in a move to survive that took them to a country where a socialist experiment would be far more welcome than some evangelical Christian group. However, in the long run the conspiracy theory made them unable to treat the visit of an investigative team as anything other than the threat of destruction. And when murder made it evident that they would be the target of a much harsher investigation, they chose to follow Jones in an act that would allow them to die for the dream rather than see it destroyed and live without it.

The comparison here with earlier known cases of mass suicide for religious purposes rests not on the length of time people had held to a tradition, but rather on the fact that they perceived no alternatives in

which they could remain the people they understood themselves to be.

What seems evident in this review is that the concepts and methods of sociology and other social sciences may provide important insights into understanding a group such as Peoples Temple, but little power of prediction as to when and how such an organization might fall into the destructive pattern it represents.

Some research has been done on the resistance, particular by the media, to sociological insights and concepts concerning Jonestown (see, e.g., Van Driel and Richardson, 1988). This review of the application of the sociological perspective may give one reason for that resistance, for it tends to indicate how close the Peoples Temple was to many other religious bodies in our society. There have been many groups that have recruited persons suffering from the "DNB" syndrome, including churches (see, e.g., Glock, Ringer, and Babbie, 1967). Charismatic leaders have often been found in pulpits. And groups suffering the paranoia of conspiracy theory may not be appreciated, but tend to be ubiquitous. Looking at the phenomenon of Peoples Temple that way makes it sound nearly normal, and what the public has wanted has not been a sense of its near normality, but of its extreme abnormality. They want proof that no ordinary person could be tempted to join such a group, because to think otherwise is to induce fear that it might happen again, and easily. At least if it is a likely event, they want sure methods for predicting and preventing another such occurrence. And they are not particularly helped when one of the factors seems to be the structure of a society in which many of the readers of social scientific reports find themselves relatively comfortable. The social scientists do not provide any assurance about the preventability of another Jonestown that most people would feel willing to accept. Is it any wonder, then, that people would look to the more certain ideologies of the anti-cult movement or other disciplines not so "understanding"?

References

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Marsden, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton. 1986. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Freund, Julien. 1968. *The Sociology of Max Weber*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Glock, Charles Y., Benjamin Ringer, and Earl Babbie. 1967. *To Comfort and to Challenge: A Dilemma of the Contemporary Church*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Glock, Charles Y. 1973. "On the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," in *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, ed. by Charles Y. Glock. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Gussner, R. E., and S. D. Berkowitz. 1988. "Scholars, Sects, and Sanghas I: Recruitment to Asian-Based Meditation Groups in North America." *Sociological Analysis* 49(2): 136-170.

Hall, John. 1981. "The Apocalypse at Jonestown," in *In Gods We Trust*, ed. by Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Hall, John. 1988. "Collective Welfare as Resource Mobilization in Peoples Temple: A Case Study of a Poor People's Religious Social Movement." *Sociological Analysis* 49(S). Forthcoming.

Long, Theodore. 1986. "Prophecy, Charisma, and Politics: Reinterpreting the Weberian Thesis," in *Prophetic Religions and Politics*, ed. by Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe. New York: Paragon House.

Moore, Rebecca. 1985. *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

Neibuhr, H. Richard. 1929. *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. New York: Henry Holt.

Richardson, James T. 1980. "Peoples Temple and Jonestown: A Corrective Comparison and Critique." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19(3): 239-255.

Richardson, James T. 1988. "Changing Times: Religion, Economics and the Law in Contemporary America." *Sociological Analysis* 49(S). Forthcoming.

Robbins, Thomas. 1987. "Religious Mass Suicide before Jonestown: The Russian Old Believers." *Sociological Analysis* 47(1):1-20.

Schaller, Lyle. 1970. *The Churches' War on Poverty*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge. 1985. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. Berkeley: University of California.

Toch, Hans. 1965. *The Social Psychology of Social Movements*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Van Driel, Barend, and James T. Richardson. 1988. "The Categorization of New Religious Movements in American Print Media." *Sociological Analysis* 49(2):171-183.

Weber, Max. 1968. *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. by S. N. Eisenstadt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jim Jones and Crisis Thought: A Critique of Established Religion

Stephen C. Rose

Ours is the century of crisis. Whether we look at the flaming hatreds leading to holocaust, the indifference of whole populations to passive genocides such as mass starvation, the creation of refugees, the proliferation of the technological options for war, or the prospects of ecological collapse, we are caught in the truism of crisis thought. And insofar as we can say that Jim Jones was a thinker, he was more than likely a crisis thinker.

Crisis is the condition of our time. From individual pathology to the movement of the global plates upon which the continents float to the expansion of information to the unfathomable capacity of the mind to absorb impulses, a permanent crisis atmosphere prevails.

The typical reaction of the general public to crisis is not much different than it always has been. The Roman gladiatorial bouts once induced the same numbness now created by television, drugs, and the dehumanizing rituals of compliance to the rigid rules of corporate capitalism and bureaucratic communism. The fates of developing countries are viewed from a distance, coldly. Shakespeare's observation that we are all players upon a stage may be supplemented with the remark that the 20th century's script may well have been written by Jean Genet. The modes by which numbness to crisis are encouraged conform to various archetypal roles played out in society by the law, the priesthood, the military, the political, the medical, and so on. Foucault is the master of elaborating this method. People do what they are "destined" to do. Freedom is denied. Choice is deemed beyond our reach. There is no

final change, only the transmutations that are possible within a script that can neither transcend nor transform our condition.

If we think upon the interplay of numbness and crisis we come finally to philosophical numbness and to the moral and spiritual collapse of organized religion in our time.

*

Two strands of thought have been elaborated by organized religion to deal with life's crises. They fall under the general headings "Transcendin," and "Transforming." The transcending mode posits a capacity to conquer death, and everything else, by finding an "existence place" that is somehow outside of everything that we seem to know. This place is a ground of being or love bliss, often called consciousness. To be in the transcending mode is to be aligned with cosmic, or universal, consciousness. Thus aligned, we see all conditions and events — history, materiality — as simply passing ephemera that have no ultimate reality. All that truly is, is good. This may be designated as a "row your boat" spirituality, in which everyone can afford a boat of their own. And as the song says, life is but a dream. It affords no comfort to today's afflicted.

Ironically, though, this approach was once the province primarily of persons too battered by the rigors of starvation and poverty to see a single vestige of hope in ordinary life. Now, in the wake of Besant's and Leadbeater's 19th century theosophical presumptions, and in the more sanitized and de-guruized emanations of the late Krishnamurti, this escapist religious scenario has become the province of the benumbed affluent. Thus, transcending spirituality gains favor under the banner of the New Age.

The transformational religious mode is the outgrowth of the activist faiths of the Middle East and the West which believe there is a reason for being that relates to human destiny, fulfillment, ethical progress and so on. The transformational outlook has always incorporated a somewhat ambivalent attitude to materiality, per se, because transformation requires changes in the material order of things. If not, we would be left with things as they are and that would hardly validate a transformational faith! So we have primitive magic, healing, resurrection, and miracle along with the more contemporary notions of transformation. These include the religious-secular beliefs in ethical progress — human rights and justice — and the currently evolving idea

that we might somehow link ethical progress to the rise in medical and technological progress. Robert Nisbet, Teilhard de Chardin, and Arnold Toynbee are among the apostles of such evolutionary transformation.

While I am certain that some of Jim Jones' followers had tasted the New Age consciousness of the transcending mode, I am equally certain that Peoples Temple saw itself in the transformation business. Jim Jones did not submerge himself in New Age religiosity. From his ersatz healing services to his boasts of miracles, to his manifest efforts to alter individuals' lives, there was a transformational quality throughout his work. Jim Jones built upon utopian premises derived from the Old Testament prophets, the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, and the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Jim Jones saw real and imagined crises. He responded. He retreated. Finally he manufactured paranoid crises in his mind. The final result was the same as if he had been an Eastern guru: a terminal numbness. Numb transcending individuals gravitate to gurus, while numb transforming people — social activists — get angry, repress their anger, and look for messiahs like Jim Jones.

*

Mainline transformational faith, both religious and secular, assumes that however imperfect we may be, we are not without the power to adjust to the ethical requirements of gradually expanding justice and entitlement. In this view, if we are oppressed we are seen as able to grasp our right to a better life. If we are privileged we are responsible for changing the unjust status quo. All political and social movements — including those which abolished child labor and slavery — have been built upon a vision of inherent human possibility.

But within the Protestantism where Jim Jones lived, moved and appeared to have his being, a divided mentality persists today regarding the nature of man. Christianity, a faith shot through with utopian calls to a superhuman notion of justice, also has a view of human nature that gives rise to hymns characterizing us as no better than worms. Orthodoxy, from the Council of Nicea — to its recent incarnation in the writings of Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr — perpetuates the understanding of the human being as both exalted and miserable. The antidote to this human condition, in the view of Paul, Augustine, Luther and Calvin, is salvation by obeisance to the church, faith in Jesus as Messiah, or a combination of the two.

During the 19th century, Protestant liberals sought to alter the orthodox perception of human nature, but the cataclysms of the 20th century brought pre-eminence to those who re-grasped orthodoxy in the form known as neo-orthodoxy. Reinhold Niebuhr's neo-orthodox devaluation of human nature was, among other things, the fruit of his disillusionment with Marxism. Such disillusionment was pro forma among those who uncritically embraced Marxism only to be confronted with the savagery of Stalin's rule. Niebuhr spoke of human grandeur, but underlined the misery of our state.

When I attended Union Theological Seminary in New York City in the late 1950s, Reinhold Niebuhr was an eminence on campus. My dominant impression was that the entire edifice of thought in those precincts was built upon the need to walk a tightrope between an appropriate worldly sophistication and the parochialism of the church into whose maw students were being prepared to walk, with all due innocence and enthusiasm. We were given, in a word, few intellectual tools for performing more than a holding action in the world. We were told to step lightly around inherited orthodoxies which we could neither believe nor embrace, and to be custodians of a church institution which had few tools for dealing with the real crises of our time. We were to take a transformative faith, mired in neo-orthodox ambivalence, into a largely intractable establishment.

Ministers of my generation serving mainline denominations had essentially two choices: simply to accept and serve the status quo which they found; or to try to develop something that responded to the general yearning in the population for movement toward peace and justice in the world. Jim Jones found himself in this second group of pastors. He swiftly realized that he would have to write his own intellectual-spiritual ticket because there was neither leadership nor consensus even on the basic values which ought to dominate a Christian perspective.

In sum, Jim Jones was a crisis-oriented mainline minister in a transforming faith tradition at a time when transforming trends in the world strained the neo-orthodox "compromise" which the church was expected to espouse and propagate.

Jones also took his inspiration and strength from the climate of the late 1960s, when the nation was in the grip of nothing less than a full-scale Batesonian double bind. A double bind is a form of a largely unconcious hypocrisy. It is saying you are fighting for one ideal when in reality you are killing that ideal by your very actions. It is saying there

is a war on poverty, and believing it, when in fact poverty is proceeding apace and there is merely the articulation of a poverty program to benefit some of those who are concerned.

Those who sense the hypocrisy of such "reality" and attempt to do something about it are prone to develop what I call a Herculean conscience, an overwhelming desire to do good and an inability to do it. Herculean conscience seeks to comprehend without numbness a world pregnant with the possibility of nuclear holocaust and a battle to the death between rich and poor. Herculean conscience has an existential awareness of major destructive forces in the world and a strong desire to do something to combat them. It recoils at inequities and is sensitive to the constant rise in the media of apocalyptic data: oil spills, nuclear leaks, famine, torture, and reminders of individual madness. Such a conscience "feels" everything and thus becomes impotent. It easily slips into paranoia, bitterness and irrational reactivity.

The failure of traditional political and religious groups — the churches, synagogues and political parties — to deal rationally with these myriad issues helped create two divergent responses. Numbness was the most common. The second was apocalyptic spirituality, the formation of communities and cults built upon fear of final disasters. Jim Jones gravitated toward the second option. Appealing to Herculean conscience, he migrated with some of his flock from Indiana to Ukiah, California. Then, when solid citizens came aboard, there was an institutional expansion to Geary Street in the heart of San Francisco. There he fused Herculean conscience with a large-scale, impressive social experiment: an actual effort to alter the fate of the underclass.

There was power in Jones' apocalyptic vision. He tapped the spiritual and economic resources of his more educated followers, and drew in the people of the ghetto. Peoples Temple was compelling to those seeking some relief from the pain of having to perceive the suffering of humanity. The Temple was doing good works so one could feel comfortable, from the point of view of conscience, to be involved. Then it all fell apart.

*

Peoples Temple tells us something about the power of emotional persuasion, of fear, of violence, and most of all, of conformism. Peoples Temple was like a laboratory for the naked exposure of these devices of intimidation. Put me in a room with ten people who want to manipulate

me, and it will be very hard to walk out when I have the first suspicion that things are not right. I always refer back to the fact that Lester Kinsolving, an Evans-Novak sort of religious journalist, had the insight to tag Jones as a dictator-messiah while the denomination to which Jones belonged defended Jones against Kinsolving!

What are we told about human nature by what occurred in the Peoples Temple? We are told about the hopeless state of those who are reduced to total physical and spiritual dependency upon others — their malleability, their vulnerability to having their lives snatched away. We are told, by the same token, how bereft of values a society and religious establishment is to allow Peoples Temple to exist and to become a suicide cult. No major independent church publication saw fit to wonder about Jim Jones, even as today no one seems to wonder about Elizabeth Clare Prophet or a hundred other guru-organizers feasting upon the vulnerabilities of those who have been deprived of elementary community and who have an aversion to conventional religious enterprises.

Peoples Temple would seem to fit into a neo-orthodox declension of reality in the following way. Jones, the theory would go, was a utopian leader who encouraged unrealistic dreams. The resulting death of his congregation was simply the logical, if tragic, outcome of his Herculean, paranoid lack of realism.

But this explanation is not broad enough. It is self-serving. Virtually no one has seen fit to see Jonestown as a commentary on the lack of focus and direction within the religious establishment as a whole. Few have seen fit to question the displacement of self that is required by some evangelical Christian conversions as analogous to the displacement of self exacted by Jones of his members. The extremities and vagaries of cults are, I believe, the flip side of the collapse of values in both religious and secular society, and the suppression of creativity and altruism by the fixity of bureaucratic mandates and conceptual blinders. Sadly, people like Jim Jones do their crisis thinking in an environment largely devoid of standards or values by which human enterprise can be evaluated or judged.

I believe the theological crisis confronting the churches is greater now than it was three decades ago. I have rarely seen it addressed, however, except in terms which lead me to suspect that churches believe the solution can be found without disturbing the fundamental lineaments of received tradition. I have found not one publisher interested in any of the issues mentioned here.

I find myself a crisis thinker who believes the biggest crisis is

where Jesus believed it to be: in the failure of parochial religious understanding to acknowledge its complicity with a parochial political status quo, in preserving the pale prerogatives of a world which will not accept the possibilities of peace, opportunity and justice. Conventional understanding cannot disturb the script which calls for war, starvation, and the sort of misery which would justify the worst visions of the TV preachers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once politely, too politely, asked the church to suspend business as usual for a time, a plea echoed by Pope John XXIII. Church leaders universally ignored both. We produce sophisticated neo-orthodox crisis thinkers to do business as usual in a corporate religious enterprise largely devoid of the prophetic courage which led Jesus to the cross.

I remember Reinhold Niebuhr regally excoriating a visiting speaker who sought to validate the social imperative to love by calling him a sectarian. But I also remember *Richard* Niebuhr coming down to Union Seminary from Yale to deliver the most significant lecture I heard during three years of seminary. The brother of Reinhold said that both 19th century liberalism and 20th century neo-orthodoxy had, by 1960, reached a dead end. He did not guess what would come after, only that there was nothing to be gained by riding upon two dead horses. I believed him then and I believe him now. Where are we? And who knows where we can or should go? Thought is suppressed in an orgy of managerial success, an orientation which mirrors the Reaganite laissez-faire culture.

Ten years after Jonestown, I am afraid if a similar incident happened today we'd shrug it off. We've already had Jonestown, and if we want magnitude, we can get it from AIDS, Chernobyl, or the military downing of passenger planes.

But this cannot be the end. Jones and his congregation died, after all, for the right to die without engaging the civil authority of the U.S. government in their fate. Was the dignity Jones called for the right to die at one's own hands rather than someone else's? I do not believe on many levels that such an interpretation stands up. But decisions involving the self and impinging only on the self must be allowed the individual. How can we judge?

Before Jonestown I was simply a discontented and renegade Christian who had all of the Herculean irritations at the religious establishment that are implicit in this essay. After Jonestown I came to an understanding that transcended the tradition I had received. Out of study of the thinking, acting Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels came a sense

of value which corresponds to what I believe to be an ethical reality which suffuses history and the cosmos. These values may be referred to in both aesthetic, religious and ethical terms. Robert Pirsig, in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, designates them with one word: "quality." For me they are what would have enabled me to look into the door of Peoples Temple on Geary Street and determine that something was terribly wrong, in spite of the good works and the concerned and lovely people.

What are these values? There are four, which emerge particularly in Mark's gospel, that work dynamically together to provide a basis for determining what is more or less worthy and what it not.

The presence of *idolatry* is always and ever the basic warning signal that something is wrong. Peoples Temple members idolized Jim Jones. Da Free John does not discourage idolatrous overtures from his devotees. Jesus, however, rejected the efforts of Peter to build a shrine to him, a fact never mentioned to me during seminary. It may be bad to have no God. It is worse by far to worship something that is not God. A discussion of values begins with the stricture against all sorts of idolatry, and the corollary: a healthy iconoclasm toward everything else that claims our allegiance.

Related to non-idolatry are two other values which operate together: radical tolerance and democracy which guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all participants, regardless of other factors. Peoples Temple was hardly a democracy. At the end it was utterly without tolerance. Indeed, I still would like to know the full extent intolerance took in the form of violence against Temple defectors in San Francisco, prior to Jonestown.

The final value in the system I developed is that of helpfulness, although I am quite careful about defining it. These days I am iconoclastic regarding the function of charity in a society that has failed to make the basic changes in budgetary priority via taxation that might guarantee equality of opportunity and access to basic human needs such as housing, education, and gainful employment. Helpfulness seems to me related to the fact that each individual has something to offer, and that thing is worth someone else's something so that there is perceived to be a mutual obligation that ensures the right of each person to the development needed in order to make a rightful exchange possible. This is not the place to elaborate this theme. Suffice it to say that it was Jonestown, in the context of my renegade 1970s journey into Biblical texts, that gave me a sense that the priority for moving toward Richard Niebuhr's "next

step" is a discussion of whether there are such things as transcendent values which are universal in scope and which are at the same time efficacious for the development of a common and universally construed ethic. And it was Jonestown which led me to an emphasis on faith as energetic human responsibility and value-choosing instead of creedal affirmation and belief.

Doubtless these considerations do not count, in academic terms, since I am by choice and by fate hardly a specialist in a world that has largely ignored generalists. But I rest content with the suggestion that without some consideration of values we will hardly be able to evaluate events as they head in our direction, crises or not. Values, *contra* Allen Bloom, are related to the root questions of good and evil, being and non-being, etc.

The church is sufficiently distanced from Jonestown that today you could convince few of any connection. But the connection remains. It can be denied only at some peril to the intellect and sensitivity that have been included in the viaticum we were given for our journey, in substantial ignorance of what lies beyond this earthly life.

Jesus' good news was that the familiar parent figure he prayed to was, and is, the one who validates the ethic I've outlined — or that He outlined, or that keeps getting outlined by history from time to time. That is the reason we may have to be hopeful about ourselves and the choices we can make. Herculean conscience is conscience minus what Jesus — not Paul or Luther — called faith. It sees moral life as a huge collection of Sysiphean labors which must be done by the few because the rest of the world is made up of implacable enemies. The mood of the aesthetical-ethical-humorous-angry-faithful sort I'm looking for is more positive. There is reason to sense that the lineaments of quality are the things for which each person strives in some form or fashion, no matter how distorted. Thus: Judge not. I like to think that Herculean conscience is a passing phenomenon in the world that is coming of age.

Jesus made Herculean conscience possible by suggesting a moral agenda that is nothing less than a call to perfection. But He added that this burden is light. His fate was premature death, and who is to say He did not choose it? If it had any purpose, it seems to have been to show that our universe is ultimately syntropic rather than entropic — a fact that would only be true if there were ultimate values and a realized destiny to which our historical evolution is somehow tied.

Jonestown relates to this in one way. While the church at large might have been reflecting on such matters and thus, perhaps, able to

warn Jones and his flock about the real Armageddon they faced, it was
wandering vaguely between simple self-preservation and the effort to
propagate doubtful legacies of neo-orthodoxy and liberalism. The dis-
tance between Peoples Temple and the church at large was not so great
as to permit such a formidable complacency. And crisis thought, alone,
will not save us.

The Historical Antecedents of Jonestown: The Sociology of Martyrdom

Thomas Robbins

The historical sociology of martyrdom is an area which deserves substantial investigation. Although there is no known evidence that Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones and some of his aides knew of the groups of Old Believers and Donatists which are discussed in this essay, there is evidence that the Temple leadership knew something of, and was influenced by, instances of mass martyrdom from the past.[1] Indeed, in the months leading up to the Jonestown suicides in November 1978, it is apparent that the leadership devoted some thought to collective suicide throughout human history (Hall, 1987:295)[2]

Martyrdom, Hall notes, "is one of the basic continuities that binds the New Testament world to the Old. Under each covenant the believers would embrace death rather than forsake their religion, and in each case, under certain conditions, the affirmation of faith effectively amounted to altruistic suicide" (1987:296).

> The historical records of this zealous martyrdom clearly show that it did not spring forth from the personal choice of individuals acting on their own. To the contrary, the attitudes and behavior that would be necessary to stage one's martyrdom were shaped through social control practices of reward and punishment [Riddle, 1931] instilled by the religious community to insure an incontrovertible sense of honor, *practices*

*that bear a striking resemblance to the ones
used by Jim Jones to create clarity and commit-
ment among the people of Jonestown.* The suicidal
impulse effected by practices of social control among the
early Christians raged to the point of group or mass
suicide, and it likely led Augustine to his strong injunc-
tion against suicide (our emphasis, Hall, 1987:296-7).[3]

In the following sections, we will describe the events leading up
to the outbreak of collective suicides in two historical episodes: the
schismatic Old Believers movement in late 17th century Russia, and the
extremist Circumcellion fringe of the schismatic Donatist "Church of
Martyrs" in North Africa during late antiquity.

The Old Believers

The present writer (Robbins, 1986) has already attempted to
apply Hall's "political" framework involving conflicts between apocalyp-
tic communal movements and the broader sociopolitical order (Hall,
1981) to the *Raskol* or Russian schismatic movement of the Old Believ-
ers, which was prone to collective suicide events, and which, like the
Peoples Temple, seems to have been rendered particularly volatile by the
shifting mix of political and religious elements in its evolving apocalyp-
tic vision (Cherniavsky, 1970). Chidester (1983, 1988) agrees that the Old
Believer mass suicides (Cherniavsky, 1970; Crummey, 1970) "provide
the most direct historical analogy to the suicides of Jonestown and
deserve greater scrutiny" (1988:135). Symbolically excluded from the
human community through excommunication, extremists among the
Old Believers were able to "escape from this subclassification" and
recover "a fully human status in death" through rituals of collective
martyrdom (1988:137). Old Believer suicides from the 17th to the 19th
centuries "represented the sustained use of collective suicide as a revo-
lutionary strategy against the overwhelming power of the Russian
church and state" (1988:135).

Although Old Believer collective suicide events did not cease
until the mid-19th century, the greatest incidents took place at the end of
the 17th century. The original schismatic leader, Archpriest Avvakum,
was burned alive at the command of Tsar Feodor after he wrote the
youthful ruler, "declaring that Christ had appeared to him in a vision

and revealed that Feodor's dead father, Tsar Alexis, was in hell suffering torments because of his approval of the Nikonian [liturgical] reforms" (Massie, 1980:65). After Tsar Feodor's death in 1682, his sister, Sophia, usurped the regency for her two brothers, Ivan and Peter (later "The Great"); and, fearing the overbearing domination of the clamorous Old Believers in the insurgent troops which had helped her seize power, suddenly arrested and executed political leaders sympathetic to the Old Believers and then passed frightful laws against the schismatics, who were to be tortured and burned (Robbins, 1986). "During a six-year period from 1688 to 1694, 20,000 Old Believers voluntarily followed their leader into the flames, preferring martyrdom to accepting the religion of Antichrist" (Massie, 1980:66). Two types of mass suicide events transpired during this period: either a schismatic commune or monastery would be discovered by authorities and attacked, whereupon the defenders would burn the buildings and themselves; or Old Believers would seize or raid a conventional religious settlement, imprisoning the inhabitants and provoking a military confrontation which would end with the dissidents immolating themselves and their captives (Crummey, 1970:38-57).

The persecution of the Old Believers was by far more vicious and palpable than the mobilization against the Peoples Temple. Nevertheless, the Old Believers were not merely "forced" to kill themselves or be killed. "The Old Believers wanted martyrdom and were willing to go to great length, to organize suitable circumstances... This urge for passive suffering was complemented by a desire, a hunger to fight back against those who had destroyed true religion. Real social and economic grievances of a local nature intensified the spirit of resistance" (Crummey, 1970:51).

The murderous edicts of the Regent Sophia were themselves a culmination of a process of "deviance amplification" whereby the Avvakumists became increasingly alienated and frustrated after failing (though nearly succeeding) in restoring the old liturgical practices whose revision under Tsar Alexis and Patriarch Nikon had set off the dissidence. Increasingly embittered, the Old Believers became increasingly "political" in their perspectives; they picked up support from dissident court factions and mutinous *streltsy* (garrison troops) as well as discontented peasants in a setting of agrarian unrest and the spread of serfdom (Cherniavsky, 1970). Eventually, after their increasing political potency had alarmed the regime and led to enhanced persecution, the dissidents began to demonize the State and Tsar, and they gradually

developed an apocalyptic "political theology" (Cherniavsky, 1970; Robbins, 1986). This vision was grounded in part in the doctrine of "Moscow the Third Rome," which was accepted by both the Old Believers and their opponents.

> Moscow was the spiritual capital of Christianity... Her unique and exclusive orthodoxy was...divinely confirmed. And as the Third Rome was also the last, this meant that Muscovite Orthodoxy was the only currency of the economy of salvation. If Moscow were to fall from grace, betray the faith as had the first two Romes, it would mean not only the fall of Moscow as a state, as divine punishment, but the end of the whole world; a fourth Rome there could not be, and Moscow's fall would signify the end of the possibility of salvation for all men, and the coming of the last days (Cherniavsky, 1970:146).

"It was this apocalyptic mood which prepared the more extreme devotees for suicide" (Robbins, 1986:8). The apostate Tsar was Antichrist, the Apocalypse was nigh and, moreover, could be hastened by direct confrontation with the demonic state and mass death in "purifying fire" which would break the seventh seal of Antichrist (Murvar, 1971). The Avvakumists were also probably influenced by earlier and smaller scale immolative collective suicides by followers of the monk, Kapiton, who had affirmed that, "the end of the world was at hand and that Antichrist already ruled the world" (Crummey, 1970:7). Although Kapiton mainly urged his followers to prepare for the apocalypse through prayer and asceticism, some devotees "longed to follow the example of the early church and suffer martyrdom for their faith" (Crummey, 1970:45). Some Kapitons "actually went looking for death. If the authorities would not oblige them, then the only alternative was suicide...Small groups of the sect's members quenched their thirst for martyrdom by burning themselves to death in 1665 and 1666 in scattered locations of northern Russia. Their example was contagious" (Crummey, 1970:45). Kapitons referred to their death rituals as "purification by fire."

Parenthetically, Chidester's analysis of the Old Believers mass suicides in *Salvation and Suicide* (1988:135) which is related to his general model of religious suicide (1983) as a reaction to subhuman classification via excommunication would appear to be incomplete in

both explanatory and interpretive terms. As Chidester acknowledges (1988:137), not all excommunicated persons and groups throughout church history have reacted suicidally. In interpretive and phenomenological terms, Chidester could have paid a bit more attention to the worldview of Russian Orthodoxy, which the Avvakumists shared, in the 17th century, a period of great apocalyptic excitation in Russia (Cherniavsky, 1970). The Old Believer extremists — there were also anti-suicidal moderates — evolved their apocalyptic worldview in the context of the Third Rome premise and its absolute rejection of the legitimacy of religious pluralism: there is One True Church which will not go into apostasy until the Last Days and the Coming of Antichrist!

The Old Believers came to accept this view gradually after a sequence of tantalizing failed opportunities to restore the old liturgy, acute frustrations and escalating persecutions. As with Jones and his sect (Hall, 1981), the political anti-state elements in the movement's worldview became increasingly prominent. Old Believer religious restorationism came to intermingle with rising currents of social, economic and political protest to form a potentially revolutionary, anti-Tsar counter-culture of agrarian and religio-political protest (Cherniavsky, 1970). This development enhanced the religious dissidents' subversive aura as perceived by the rulers, who reacted by intensifying persecution, thus further feeding apocalyptic frenzy and despair. Eventually, after many of the suicidal extremists were dead and Peter the Great had rescinded the more vicious of Sophia's edicts, moderates gained control of the movement and developed thriving communities (Crummey, 1970).

According to Murvar (1971) there has existed a Russian messianic tradition which has emphasized extreme asceticism and rejection of life on the part of the elect who realize that enjoyment of life postpones the millennium and enhances the strategy of Satan. Particular sects specialized in particular violent rejections of life and enjoyment.

> To reject life itself, several alternatives were dogmatically available: mass suicide, mercy killing, and voluntary castration. The *Skopei* (Castrated Ones) were the only sect preaching voluntary castration as a means of defeating the evil creator. A few sects specialized in mercy killing to liberate from the necessity of living under the rule of Antichrist, innocent babes, *Dietoubiic,* and infirm oldsters, *Dusilsckiki* and

Tiukalsciki. Much more enthusiasm and sectarian variety was attributed to the doctrine of mass suicide (Murvar, 1971:295).

Donatism and Sacred Martyrdom

In a recent essay on "Archaic Forms of Rebellion and their Religious Background," Grottanelli (1985) ignores the Old Believers but highlights the Circumcellions (Brown, 1967:212-339; Frend, 1952; Knox, 1950:50-70), a violent extremist sect within the schismatic Donatist Church in late antiquity in Roman North Africa. The Donatist Circumcellions "combined guerrilla activity against Catholic landowners with a greedy quest for martyrdom with mass suicides in the name of a strongly radical faith" (Grottanelli, 1985:28). Having previously compared Jonestown with the Old Believer suicides (Robbins, 1986), we will examine the Donatist "Church of the Martyrs" and the violent Circumcellions at some length before attempting in the final section to draw together some common threads with respect to a number of suicidal groups and violent events.

The rise of Donatism (Frend, 1952) cannot be understood apart from the development of a Christian cult of martyrdom during the Roman persecutions of Christianity and the phenomena of partly voluntary Christian martyrdom (Dodds, 1967:135; Frend, 1952; Pagels, 1981:97-122). In the context of persecution, martyrist zeal and apocalyptic frenzy flourished.

> Moreover, the conviction that martyrdom granted immediate admission to paradise and conferred a victor's crown, combined with a sombre evaluation of the Roman empire as a political institution, led to a tendency towards acts of provocation on the part of over-enthusiastic believers, especially the Montanists [second century apocalyptic Christian sect]... who were particularly prone to identify reticence with cowardice and moral compromise. Hotheads who provoked the authorities were soon censured by the church as mere suicides deserving of no recognition (Chadwick, 1967:30).

According to Tertullian, crowds of Christians in Asia Minor demanded martyrdom from reluctant Roman officials, though the tale may be exaggerated (Fox, 1986:442; Frend, 1952:115). Tertullian, who ultimately became a Montanist, maintained that Christians should always be constantly prepared for martyrdom, which was "the sole death worthy of a Christian and was counseled by the spirit. Rather than die naturally a Christian should offer himself voluntarily to the judges...and if necessary he should be ready to take his life. These views [later] found their logical development in Donatism, and the extreme wing of the community, the Circumcellion movement" (Frend, 1952:121).

By 200 A.D. praise to martyrs had become second only to praise to God. Martyrs awaiting execution in prison (often for long periods) achieved high status in the Christian community and were adulated as intercessors who could forgive Christians' sins (Frend, 1952:116; Fox, 1986:449). The veneration of such confessors became "a widespread habit entrenched in many Christians' lives" and led "directly into the Christian veneration of living 'holy men' which took over when persecution finally ceased" (Fox, 1986:449).

By the end of the 2nd century, speculates Frend (1952:16), "a militant body of martyrs and ascetics, the *agonisti,* may have already been developing into a caste apart within the Christian community." Riddle (1931) delineates the modes of socialization and social control which prepared Christians for martyrdom, and Hall (1986:196-7) discerns significant convergences between these patterns and the social control practices operative at Jonestown. Certainly there were strong pressures in Christian communities supportive of martyrdom which were interlaced with beliefs inhibiting accommodative survival. As an example, Christians who backed down in the face of persecution to the extent of ritual eating of meat sacrificed to pagan gods or to Caesar were said to have consumed demons who sat upon the meat and swarmed in the smoke and incense accompanying the sacrifice. Such threatening tales "may help to explain why some lapsed Christians could not live with their sin and returned to efface it by provoking their own arrest" (Fox, 1986:444).

Austere rigorist orientations were particularly strong in North African Christianity, where they may represent continuity with a sacrificial ethos in pre-Christian African paganism as well as the fanaticism evident in some North African Islamic movements (Frend, 1952). But in Africa and elsewhere there was also an accommodative moderate

party which favored a less rigorist and puritanical ethic, a more inclusive church and a forgiving attitude towards *lapsis* who made brief temporary accommodations in order to survive during transitory bouts of intense persecution which interrupted longer periods of respite and benign neglect. These latter periods encouraged the decline of martyrist and apocalyptic fervor, as the Church expanded and grew richer and its more respectable members became complacent, unused to living on the edge, and more inclined to accept the necessity of making occasional nominal submissions to imperial civil religion.

The divergence and conflict between rigorist and accommodative persuasions became more marked in the later persecutions such as that of the emperor Decius (A.D. 250-3). "During the persecution ecstatic crowds kept vigil round the prisons, and afterwards during the plague which ravaged Carthage in A.D. 252 many were tortured by the fear of losing their chance of martyrdom rather than by the prospect of death" (Frend, 1952:126). Yet there was also wholesale instrumental apostasy featuring reports of erstwhile Christians besieging provincial capitals to make nominal sacrifices to the Emperor. Prominent bishops lapsed. "Many of those who accepted certificates that they had sacrificed...appear to have had little idea of sin or belief that divine punishment would follow... They were prepared to sacrifice one day and to receive communion the next" (Frend, 1982:126-7).

As the "permissive" orientation gradually became dominant, protests and schisms developed, such as the schismatic Novatian Church, which originated in Rome but was briefly viable in Carthage. The Novatians, who foreshadowed the Donatists, emphasized strict morality, exclusion of the *lapsi* from the church and rebaptism of persons converted by lapsed Christians.

The final Great Persecution (A.D. 303-5) transpired under the auspices of the reforming Emperor Diocletian, who, "attempted to extirpate the Christian faith, and succeeded in lightening the labours of textual criticism, by ordering that all Bibles should be given up burned in public. Those who conformed to this edict were known as *Traditores*" (Knox, 1950:53).

Rigorist orientations tended to be associated with an apocalyptic belief in "the approaching end of the world to be followed by the thousand year reign of Christ and his Elect. This last factor sustained the Christians in their attitude of hostility to pagan Roman Society. Ills suffered in this world would be repaid on the Day of Judgement" (Frend, 1952:114). Yet, "The spread of Christianity in Africa, by indiscriminately

filling the churches, had simply washed away the clear moral land-marks that separated the 'church' from 'the world'" (Brown, 1967:213). The legitimation of Christianity by Constantine, less than a generation after Diocletian's Great Persecution, and the subsequent integration of the Church into the Roman imperium, further undercut the apocalyptic-sectarian view of the Church as a pure enclave, a Church of the Righteous, set apart from "the world" as "an alternative to something 'unclean' and hostile" (Brown, 1967:213). The last rampart from which to defend apocalyptic sectarianism was the idea that the Church embodied a unique quality of purity and holiness which excluded sinners such that unworthy and apostate bishops must be cast out! Apostate (e.g. *Traditore*) bishops purportedly "threatened the identity of the true Church and created a sinister, demonic 'Church of Judas'" (Brown, 1967:213).

In 311 A.D. there was a disputed election to the see of Carthage. The successful candidate, Caecilian, had opposed the more extreme rigorists during the Great Persecution. Moreover, the bishop who consecrated him was alleged to have been a *Traditore.* Dissident Numidian bishops elected their own bishop of Carthage, and when he died shortly thereafter, the dissidents elected the energetic Donatus, who created a great movement.

Like the earlier Novatians, the Donatists set up their own parallel, "purified" ecclesiastical structure; however, their church managed to persist until the Islamic invasion of North Africa over 300 years later, when both the Donatist and the orthodox church more or less disappeared from North Africa and only the heretical Egyptian Coptic church survived. The Donatist Church had many vicissitudes: periods when the Donatist Church was dominant over much of North Africa and the Catholic Church suffered harassment, as well as several periods of intense persecution of the Donatists, which the latter endured in part because persecution reinforced their identity as the Righteous Martyrs, the True Church in a sinister world of demons. They had been obsessed with martyrdom even before they were persecuted! A 20th century Catholic Scholar writes:

> In all ages, the tendency of the heretic has been to single
> out one aspect of Christian life or doctrine, and treat it as
> if it were the whole: bodily healing, if you are a Christian
> Scientist, survival after death, if you are a spiritualist.
> The Donatists chose martyrdom for their special devo-

tion; and enriched the annals of Christian abnormality
with a unique record of misguided heroisms (Knox,
1950:61).

The Circumcellions

The Circumcellion "strange revolutionary fringe of Donatism"
first appears in 340 A.D. (Frend, 1952:171). Circumcellions appear to
have been mainly peasants from Upper Numidia and Mauretania, who,
according to anti-Donatist writers such as St. Augustine and St. Op-
tatus, "had thrown up their holdings and were living by terrorizing the
great estates" (Frend, 1952:172). But they were also religious fanatics
who lived around the shrines (*circum cellus*) and who were embarked
on a kind of perpetual pilgrimage and were fed at martyrs' shrines
(Frend, 1952:193).

> The Circumcellions, it is well known, used to commit
> suicide, often by throwing themselves down the rocks,
> with the intention of being honoured as martyrs after
> their death... [they were said to be] feted, on the eve of this
> eccentric act of self-immolation, [sic] by sympathizers
> who provided them with lavish meals — in something,
> one supposes, of a cup-tie spirit (Knox, 1950:61).

"The lives of the Circumcellions were in fact devoted to martyr-
dom." They practiced what the great rigorist, Tertullian, had preached.

> They were renowned as much for the over-observance of
> ritual as for violence... The Circumcellion merely rep-
> resented Donatist doctrine in its extreme form. Warned
> by a dream or revelation that his time was at hand, a
> Circumcellion would go forth and stop a traveller, or
> better still, more reminiscent of the heroic age of Chris-
> tianity, a magistrate. The unfortunate would be given
> the choice of killing or being killed. Others would rush in
> on a pagan festival and offer themselves for human
> sacrifice. They became martyrs automatically, and
> similarly those who perished in attacks on villas or
> Catholic churches. As Augustine put it, they lived as

robbers, died as Circumcellions, and were honoured as
martyrs. The alternative was mass suicide. Crowds
would fling themselves over precipices or drown in the
Chotts, or even burn themselves alive (Frend, 1952:175).

Although seemingly masochistic and expressive, the violence of
the Circumcellions had an instrumental significance. The Donatist
Church had co-existed with Christian orthodoxy for generations when
St. Augustine became its chief antagonist:

Any attempt by Augustine and his colleague to upset the
status quo by sending preachers to Donatist areas, and
later by using force against Donatist churches, was held
in check by such [Circumcellion] bands. Compared
with the Catholic persecutions, the violence of the Cir-
cumcellions would always seem erratic and aimless,
such violence reached a climax only as an answer to the
use of force by the Catholics. But such incidents 'made
headlines.' They will ensure that Augustine's account
of Donatism came to be perpetuated by tales of 'atroci-
ties'... (Brown, 1967:229).

By the late 4th century, under the inspiration of Optatus, Dona-
tist Bishop of Thamugadi, "the Circumcellions became something of a
military force. Their clubs and staves were supplemented by swords,
spears, and other weapons, their services were at the disposal of the
[Donatist] clergy and bishops to crush incipient schisms or to overawe
the Catholics and possessing classes" (Frend, 1952:209-10).

The Circumcellions have also been accused of "antinomian
leanings" in relation to their recruitment of unmarried women as
itinerant camp-followers. This was embarrassing to Donatist leaders,
who claimed to be leading a rigorist movement in which unworthy
ministers could not dispense grace, i.e., "they were the church of
martyrs, in competition with the Church of *Traditores*" (Knox,
1950:66).

The frenzied and violent Circumcellions embarrassed the
Donatist bishops, yet they came in handy. "They were alternately stirred
up and discouraged by the Donatist leaders. When it was convenient,
they were disowned and the fact was loudly proclaimed; when there was
some tough work to be done, like sacking a Catholic church or a Roman

villa, or bringing troublesome dissenters to heel, the Circumcellions would be called in" (Frend, 1952:172). Occasionally Donatist leaders called upon magistrates and officials to check the wild bands (Frend, 1952:176). Knox (1950:59) refers to "the uneasy alliance between the Donatists and the Circumcellions, who alternately pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them and fill them with alarm for their own safety..." Frend (1952:172) compares the Circumcellion "terrorists" to the Irgun Zvai Leumi, i.e., the Circumcellions were to Donatism as the Irgun was to the broader Zionist movement (although Frend wrote before the erstwhile ruthless Irgun leader, Menachem Begin, became prime minister of Israel!). A schism within the Donatist church, one of several, was precipitated by the forthright denunciation of the Circumcellions by Rogatus, Donatist Bishop of Cartenna (Frend, 1952:197), who came to lead a heretical quietist sect of Donatism.

"The Circumcellions," according to Frend (1952:177), "indicate the union of social and religious discontent in the Donatist movement." Frend depicts the Circumcellions as landless laborers and small peasant freeholders who were essentially rising against large landowners. Frend sees the Circumcellions as closely tied to the broader Donatist movement, whose adherents tended to be concentrated largely in the rural areas rather than in towns, and in Berber speaking areas rather than areas in which Latin or Punic speech predominated (Frend, 1952). Frend's treatment appears overly reductive to Brown (1961, 1963, 1967) and MacMullen (1966), who assert the primacy of distinctively religious issues. The Donatists are said to have recruited from all classes and social groups, while the Circumcellions were simply manipulated by influential and propertied Donatists and employed as shock troops. Mann (1986) infers an underlying consensus that the basic issue primarily involved neither doctrine nor social revolution but "the nature of the Church as a society and its relationship to the world," i.e., "different notions of organization and identity": Donatist "transcendent separatism" vs. an emerging, more worldly "Christian imperial identity" (see also Murvar, 1975). Knox (1950) as well as Frend sees Numidian nationalism as playing a role in Donatism; yet such interactions are not easy to unravel, "who shall say whether the Scots disliked the book of Common Prayer because it was Episcopalian, or because it was English?" (Knox, 1950:63).

After various ups and downs, the tide finally turned decisively against the Donatists in 405 when the Emperor Honorius' Edict of Unity formally proscribed Donatism, exiled Donatist clergy and confiscated

Donatist property. African persecution was spearheaded by the ortho-
dox Bishop of Hippo, St. Augustine, who developed theoretical justifica-
tions for the use of coercion. "The intransigent Circumcellions were
driven to one last fling of infuriated atrocities" (Chadwick, 1967:225).

> The Circumcellion movement might have formed the
> backbone of the resistance. But their bands were now
> deprived of leadership from the bishops of the towns,
> perhaps also, of material support: the fanatical aggres-
> sion that had once been turned outwards, against the
> 'unclean' Catholics, was now turned inwards in these
> despairing men, in a horrible epidemic of suicides
> (Brown, 1967:335).

The Donatist Church lingered on through intensified Catholic
persecution and through the domination of North Africa by the Van-
dals, who persecuted all non-Arian Christians, but it became increas-
ingly marginal and did not survive the 7th century Moslem conquest.

Analysis

Hall reminds us that there is a Christian tradition of millenar-
ian suicide in which dying devotees perish in the conviction that their
deaths will spark or hasten the imminent apocalypse which will destroy
those who persecuted them (Frend, 1967). But Hall argues that in some
respects Jonestown did *not* continue this tradition but really evoked an
earlier militant Jewish suicide tradition (Frend, 1967) in which collec-
tive suicide is envisioned as a rebuke to the larger society and a vindica-
tion of the departed *but not as itself an eschatological event and
redemptive demiurge*. The leaders of Jonestown styled their act in
the traditions of pre-Christian Jewish martyrdom and ancient Greek
heroism, mediated through the black power theme of Revolutionary
Suicide (Hall 1987:130-138). The Old Believers, of course, constitute a
classic instance of the redemptive-eschatological suicide.

The suicides of Jewish zealots at Masada in 73 A.D. are often
cited as revolutionary religious suicides, although these acts seem "to
have been improvised in response to the exigencies of a particular
military situation" (Chidester, 1988:135). Hall and Chidester have not
considered the Circumcellions, and Hall, Chidester and Grottanelli all

neglect Islamic, particularly Shiite, traditions of sacred martyrdom, which go back to the Middle Ages (Lewis, 1967) but may have contemporary politico-military importance (Keddi, 1987-88).

As Chidester notes, religious suicide is not always collective in the immediate context, even when supported by group norms and socialization, e.g., "the *Endura*, among the Cathari who flourished against official church persecution during the twelfth century in southern France..."

> Holding a strict Manichean dualism that regarded the world as a region of defilement, the Cathari elect, or perfect, would resort to ritual suicide, usually through self-starvation but sometimes through more rapid means of poison or opening the veins, in order to remove themselves from the world (Chidester, 1988:133-4; see also Runciman, 1961).

Can we draw together some common threads which run through the various historical episodes, particularly the Old Believers, the Circumcellions, and of course, Jonestown, which we have examined?

Apocalypticism. An apocalyptic general cultural climate seems to be present in each context, in which narrower apocalyptic subcultures also emerged. The 1970s in the United States was a period of apocalyptic expectation (Martin, 1982; Naipaul, 1981; Robbins, 1986). Jim Jones' movement was located at a point of intersection of various apocalyptic currents such as Black Militant evocations of imminent racial genocide and fascist dictatorship, Protestant fundamentalist premillenial and dispensationalist visions, and New Age/guru/consciousness mystiques (Hall, 1987; Naipaul, 1981; Robbins, 1986). The mid-1600s began a period of apocalyptic excitation in Russia, triggered in part by the discovery and publication of prophetic Ukrainian literature (Cherniavsky, 1970); while agrarian discontent, the growth of Tsarist absolutism, religious innovations and the destruction of Muscovite cultural traditions fueled the emergence of apocalyptic Tsar-is-Antichrist subcultures in the late 17th and 18th centuries (Cherniavsky, 1970; Robbins, 1986). In North Africa and elsewhere, intermittent persecutions of Christianity produced apocalyptic "Last Days" expectations among fervent Christians, which produced, among other phenomena, the visionary Montanist heretics (Fox, 1986:375-418; Knox, 1950:25-49).[4]

In the aftermath of persecutions, conflicts developed between apocalyptic rigorists and those who sought to normalize Christianity. The growth and eventual legalization of Christianity both challenged and intensified apocalyptic sectarian perspectives, which became linked to cognitive minorities and alienated enclaves whose members could perceive the coming of Antichrist in the degradation of post-Constantinian Christianity — now appropriated by the same autocratic Roman state which had formerly presided over vicious persecutions (Frend, 1952; Murvar, 1975). There is a viable comparison between the Donatists and the Old Believers in terms of a protest against the growth of Caesaropapist domination of the Church and the subordination of religious authority to political autocracy (Cherniavsky, 1970; Murvar, 1975). Ultimately, the more extreme Donatists and Old Believers, as well as the Jonesites, came to view their own groups as beleaguered enclaves of purity in a fundamentally demonic and doomed world.

Suicide-Homicide. The concomitance and interaction of other-directed and self-directed violence is a conspicuous feature of all the cases discussed here. The Circumcellions, as we have seen, slaughtered Catholics and landlords in what was more or less an endemic civil war setting, and also dispatched captives who refused to kill their captors. The Old Believers provoked some, although not all, of the military expeditions sent against them by seizing or raiding conventional religious settlements. Jim Jones' followers commenced the mass violence in Guyana with a murderous assault on the visiting party of Congressman Leo Ryan. Some of the believers who died at Jonestown are thought to have simply been murdered (Hall, 1987; Chidester, 1988). The Old Believers took captives whom they immolated. Moreover, there were accusations at the time, by Avvakumist moderates, that some believers such as women and children were involuntary participants in the suicides (Crummey, 1970; Robbins, 1986). Homicidal attacks on opponents tended to give way to suicides when the balance of power shifted against the apocalyptic sect, e.g., militarily besieged Old Believers immolating themselves as the soldiers were near to breaking through communal defenses (Crummey, 1970). Circumcellions erupted in a final suicidal frenzy as Augustine and the Orthodox-Roman forces began to gain a decisive advantage (Brown, 1967), although there had been prior Circumcellion suicides in different circumstances.

Persecution. The Old Believers were threatened with torture and burning during the rule of the regent Sophia. These edicts could not

be totally enforced and the Believers, once energized by apocalyptic visions, sometimes had to seek out confrontations with authorities. Cherniavsky (1970) and others imply that the real impact of persecution was partly symbolic: that the Tsar could persistently sustain apostasy and persecute the faithful was seen to be indicative of the imminence of the Last Days. Similarly, pre-Constantinian Roman persecutions didn't tangibly touch many Christians, since prominent Christians were mainly targeted, and a nominal gesture not disapproved of in many Christian quarters could ward off punishment. But the symbolic fact of the persecution of the Messiah's believers by the great universal empire seemed to say something about the historico-cosmic state of affairs. On the other hand, the persecution visited upon the Peoples Temple was conspicuously mild by Donatist and Avvakumist standards, a fact which will be interpreted in some quarters and with some justification as indicative of a unique or at least far greater pathology manifested by Jones and his movement. Yet there was an escalating conflict with a determined opposition, whose growing power intensified the rigor of social control at Jonestown and the paranoia of Jones' outlook (Hall, 1987; Naipaul, 1981). Absent the dramatic but arguably foolhardy and provocative expedition of Congressman Ryan, the actual mass death might never have transpired.

     Moderates. We have seen that there was an uneasy alliance of the Circumcellions and clerical or otherwise privileged Donatists. The latter alternately encouraged, tried to constrain, deplored or blushed over the Circumcellions. The schismatic, quietist "Rogatist" Donatists were more straightforward in their denunciations of Circumcellion violence, for which they were stigmatized by the Donatist leaders and attacked by Mauretanian soldiers allied to the latter (Frend, 1952). There were definitely moderate elements in the *Raskol* such as the monk Evfrosin, who denounced the suicides (Crummey, 1970:55-56; Robbins, 1986). Avvakum himself, who died before most of the suicide events, never accepted the most extreme formulations suggesting the Tsar was personally Antichrist and that the apostasy of the Russian Church and Tsar was beyond redemption (Cherniavsky, 1970). The persistence of moderates such as the Denisov brothers enabled the movement to survive the mass suicides and grow and diversify (Crummey, 1970), in stark contrast to the much smaller Peoples Temple. Yet the Peoples Temple settlements existing in California at the time of the Jonestown tragedy did not succumb to suicidal frenzy.

Religion and Social Protest. The interaction of deviant religion and social protest is a conspicuous feature of all the movements and episodes examined here. The Old Believers increasingly attracted discontented peasants, e.g., Old Believer settlements allegedly welcomed fleeing survivors of the failed revolt of Stepan Razin (Crummey, 1970), which elicited more hostility and persecution from the authorities. Old Believer religious restorationism was to figure, along with violent hostility to the Tsar and the nobility, in future rebellions such as Pugachev's revolt against Catherine the Great (Cherniavsky, 1970). There is some debate over the degree to which liturgical restorationism was essentially a symbolic expression of popular resistance to the imposition of serfdom and the bureaucratic consolidation of the Tsarist state (Crummey, 1970; Robbins, 1986), but there is clearly present a social as well as a Muscovite xenophobic factor since the detested Nikonian liturgical reforms reflected Greek and South Slavic influences. Similarly, there were social revolutionary and Numidian nationalist elements in the Donatist dissent and Circumcellion violence, although the relative significance of these sociological factors has been debated (Brown, 1967; Frend, 1952; Knox, 1950; Mann, 1986). Finally, the role of protest themes in the development of the Peoples Temple, from its early integrationism and anti-racism to its later quasi-Marxist and seemingly atheist, but perhaps also gnostic, phases (Chidester, 1988; Hall, 1981, 1987) is conspicuous. Perhaps there is something particularly explosive about the synthesis of revolutionary social protest and religious fervor.

One consequence of the religion/social protest interface is the two-tiered quality of each movement: Caucasian educated intelligentsia and spiritual seekers leading deprived blacks in California and Guyana (Hall, 1987; Naipaul, 1981; Weightman, 1983); dissident Russian monks ministering to illiterate but discontented peasants threatened by serfdom (Crummey, 1960; Murvar, 1971); and Donatist bishops and landowners manipulating fanatical peasants and laborers facing economic decline (Frend, 1952). But the Peoples Temple was still different from the other two movements in that, as Weightman (1983) emphasizes, it was the educated leadership who seemed to focus on social change while the poorer blacks were concerned more with personal and healing-therapeutic rewards.

Politicization. In the context of Russian absolutism, the Old Believer opposition to liturgical reforms was partly political from the outset; nevertheless, "gradually political elements in the revolt achieved

increasing prominence until, in the last stages, it became a hopeless protest against the legitimacy and effective power of the Russian government" (Crummey, 1970:21). "Both the Peoples Temple and the Old Believers combined political-revolutionary and world-rejecting sectarian tendencies. As both movements evolved, the former elements became increasingly prominent" (Robbins, 1986:17), particularly in the case of the Temple, whose leader, a minister ordained by the Disciples of Christ, ultimately renounced the Christian God. The politicization dynamic is also evident in the evolution of Donatism. The highest Roman authorities (e.g., Constantine and his successors) rejected Donatist claims to legitimacy. Like the later Avvakumists, the Donatists claimed to be *the* Church, although they later advanced futile pleas for toleration. The Donatists then persisted in part by making alliances with strong Mauretanian chiefs such as the brothers Firmus and Gildo, who sequentially ruled somewhat autonomously under Roman auspices before revolting against Rome. The final defeat of Gildo's insurrection in 399, which prominent Donatist leaders had supported, discredited the schismatic church and led to more intense and effective persecutions in the 5th century. Thus the Donatists came to reject the post-Constantinian hieratic imperialization of Christianity (Murvar, 1975) and even doubt the legitimacy of imperial authority.

Conclusion

What kinds of movements in what contexts are likely to become involved in collective suicides?[5] Obviously a "cult of martyrdom" as in Donatist and Shiite traditions may enhance the violent proclivities of later groups. In this respect, Frend (1952) seems to argue that there is an austere, violent and sacrificial tradition in North Africa deriving from pre-Christian pagan cults through the rigorism of Tertullian and the subsequent Donatist schism and Circumcellion extremism, and culminating in North African Islamic groups such as puritanical Berber sects, dervishes, etc. Murvar (1971) discusses a violent Russian messianic tradition from the Kapitons up to ascetic secular revolutionaries. Conceivably the Peoples Temple could begin a tradition!

John Hall's analysis, particularly his earlier paper (1981) which the present writer has applied to Old Believer suicides (Robbins, 1986), directs our attention to movements which uneasily combine political and religious elements within an apocalyptic temporal frame-

work. The Unification Movement, whose "messianic prophecy... is defined in political terms" (Robbins and Anthony, 1984) represents one controversial group which might fit the bill, but the movement's mood is hardly one of pessimistic despair. It is heavily institutionalized in potentially secularizing political, economic and media projects (Bromley, 1985; Robbins and Anthony, 1984), although there are recent sensational developments (Isikoff, 1988). A greater volatility, according to some observers, may be found in cults of the 1980s, which recruit from urban minorities who were not part of the economic recovery and patriotic revitalization of the Reagan years, e.g., groups such as the anarchist MOVE in Philadelphia, involved in two deadly shoot-outs with police in a decade, which do appear to court violent confrontations while simultaneously directing some effort to develop an exemplary communal refuge. Groups opposing and/or opposed by authorities seem to be most at risk, e.g., the 1987 death of approximately 30 persons in South Korea in a collective suicide event within a "cult" whose female leader was being sought by state authorities in connection with a criminal investigation; or the 1988 death of a Utah policeman in a siege of the fortified camp of a clan of heterodox Mormon polygamists, whose patriarch was wanted for bombing a Mormon temple and who anticipated that any attempt by police to seize the leader would trigger the resurrection of the clan's former martyred leader — killed by police a decade earlier — possibly to be succeeded by the return of Christ.

Similar events will probably occur in the future. Can scholars attain an understanding of such events beyond simplistic warnings against cultic mind control? Is any incisive understanding or explanation beyond Chidester's interpretive worldview mapping really possible?[6]

Essential to any heightened understanding of these events may be a more dynamic political conception of religion. Chidester notes that in the process of cognitively distancing themselves from Jonestown, political activists (e.g., socialist) stressed the religious or cultist quality of the Temple, while some religious (e.g., Christian) writers emphasized its political, and thus non-religious nature (e.g., Novak, 1979). But, "religion and politics are not separate spheres of sacred and profane power but coordinated exercises of religiopolitical power within alternative religiopolitical systems...every religious worldview inevitably has a political dimension in its concern for the meaning and exercise of power within human social relations" (Chidester, 1988:165-6). In his discussion of "cognitive distancing," Chidester (1988) evaluates the impact, or

rather, the non-impact, of Jonestown on American culture. The horror has indeed been exorcised, and except for enhanced legitimation of cult-baiting there has been rather limited cultural impact and little collective memory. Nevertheless, Jonestown has perhaps contributed to a shifting image of American and modern religion, which as denominational differences appeared to diminish in the 1950s (Wuthnow, 1988), had often been viewed as vaguely beneficent, not terribly relevant beyond familial settings, and possessing more or less interchangeable components, i.e., particular faiths. This was partly the context of the enhanced respect for nominal religious diversity and "free exercise" in past decades. But Jonestown and associated agitation and controversies over cults have contributed to a reconsideration of civil libertarian norms of religious freedom (Stander, 1987). Jonestown and cults, evangelical political activism, liberation theology, anti-American Islamic fervor and other currents have stimulated challenges to influential popular and sociological conceptions which have viewed religion as, in the words of one critic, the "wallpaper of the social system" (Beckford, 1987:34). But as religion comes now to be viewed as much more than that benign entity through which "the family that prays together stays together," tolerance for its free exercise may diminish and "objectivity" in the study of religion will become more problematic (Robbins, 1988).

Notes

1. "In *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides described how, during the fifth century B.C., certain people of Corcyra took their own lives at the Temple of Juno when they saw their cause was lost" (Hall, 1987:295). Jones and some close colleagues seem to have devoted some study to the "logic and practices of martyrdom," and a surviving Temple document suggests that Thucydides' account may have helped inspire Jones' fixation on redemptive mass suicide (1987:295).

2. For a longer review and discussion of two recent works by Hall (1987) and Chidester (1988), see "The Second Wave of Jonestown Literature" in this volume.

3. For material cited in this connection by Hall, see Battin, 1982; Frend, 1967; Riddle, 1931.

4. After its 2nd century heyday Montanism declined and ultimately retreated to the area of its origins in Phyrgia in Asia Minor. Centuries later under Emperor Justinaian there were rigorous persecutions of the peasant survivors, who "locked themselves into their churches and burned themselves to death rather than fall into the hands of their fellow-Christians" (Dodds, 1967:67). Dodds cites Labriolle (1913).

5. Some anti-cult writing has emphasized the gnostic elements in contemporary cults and New Age movements as related to their destructive aspects. It is worth noting that Pagels (1979) argues that gnostic Christians, because they interpreted the resurrection of Christ as a continual inner spiritual apotheosis rather than a unique historical event, and because they also saw Christ's crucifixion as an apparent-spiritual rather than actual-physical event, tended to reject the view embraced by many orthodox leaders that martyrdom, as an imitation of the passion of Christ, conferred automatic salvation and spiritual exaltation on the martyrs. Gnostics were thus less likely than non-gnostic Christians to joyfully embrace and even court martyrdom.

6. The empathetic interpretative mode of Chidester (see "The Second Wave of Jonestown Literature," this volume) might be seen as a response to the undermining, in a period of religious turmoil, of the claims to objectivity in behalf of the detached and scientific pursuit of causal explanation of religious phenomena. If explanation necessarily codifies private agendas, priority must shift to mapping out symbolic meanings and worldviews as experienced by religious subjects. Yet the explanations of historians, though biased, make their works interesting (e.g., Gibbon).

References

Battin, M.P. 1982. *Ethical Issues in Suicide*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Beckford, James. 1987. "The Restoration of 'Power' to the Sociology of Religion." Pp. 13-38 in T. Robbins and R. Robertson (eds.) *Church-State Relations*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Bromley, David G. 1985. "Financing the Millennium: The Economic Structure of the Unification Movement." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (3), 253-274.

Brown, Peter. 1961. "Religious Dissent in the Later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa." *History,* 46.

Brown, Peter. 1963. "Religious Coercion in the Later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa." *History,* 48.

Brown, Peter. 1967. *Augustine of Hippo*. New York: Dorset.

Chadwick, Henry. 1967. *The Early Church*. New York: Dorset.

Cherniavsky, Michael. 1970. "The Old Believers and the New Religion." Pp. 140-188 in M. Cherniavsky (ed.) *The Structure of Russian History*. New York: Random House (reprinted from *Slavic Review*, 25, 1, 1966).

Chidester, David. 1983. "Religious Suicide: Death and Classification at Jonestown." Presented to the American Academy of Religion, Dallas.

Chidester, David. 1988. *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown*. Bloomington: Indiana University.

Crummey, Robert. 1970. *The Old Believers and the World of AntiChrist*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.

Dodds, E. R. 1967. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. New York: Norton.

Fox, Robin Lane. 1987. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Knopf.

Frend, W. C. 1952. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*. Garden City: Doubleday.

Grottanelli, Christiano. 1985. "Archaic Forms of Rebellion and Their Religious Background." Pp. 26-29 in B. Lincoln (ed.) *Religion, Rebellion, Revolution*. New York: St. Martins.

Hall, John. 1981 "The Apocalypse at Jonestown." Pp. 171-190 in T. Robbins and D. Anthony (eds.) *In Gods We Trust*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Hall, John. 1987. *Gone From the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Isikoff, Michael. 1988. "Did Moon's Son Return from the Dead?" *Washington Post National Weekly Ed.* (April 11-17):10-11.

Keddi, Nikki. 1987-8. "Iranian Imbroglios: Who's Irrational?" *World Policy Journal* V(1): 29-54.

Knox, Ronald. 1950. *Enthusiasm*. London: Collins.

Labriolle, Pierre de. 1913. *La Crise Montaniste*.

Lewis, Bernard. 1967. *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam*. New York: Oxford.

MacMullen, Ramsay. 1966. *Enemies of Roman Order*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

Mann, Michael. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Martin, William. 1982. "Waiting for the End." *The Atlantic Monthly* (June):31-37.

Massie, Robert. 1980. *Peter The Great*. New York: Knopf.

Murvar, Vatro. 1971. "Messianism in Russia: Religious and Revolutionary." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 10 (4): 277-338.

Murvar, Vatro. 1975. "Toward a Sociological Theory of Religious Movements." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 14 (3):229-257.

Naipaul, Shiva. 1981. *Journey to Nowhere: A New World Tragedy*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Novak, Michael. 1979. "Jonestown: Socialism at Work." *American Enterprise Institute*. Reprint No. 94.

Pagels, Elaine. 1981. *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House.

Riddle, Donald. 1931. *The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Robbins, Thomas. 1986. "Religious Mass Suicide Before Jonestown: The Russian Old Believers." *Sociological Analysis* 41 (1):1-20.

Robbins, Thomas. 1988. "The Transformative Impact of the Study of New Religious Movements on the New Religious Movements." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27 (1): 12-31.

Robbins, Tom and Dick Anthony. 1984. "The Unification Church." *The Ecumenist*, September-October.

Runciman, Stephen. 1961. *The Medieval Manichee*. New York.

Stander, Fay. 1987. "Some Rigors of Our Times: The First Amendment Real Life and Death. One ACLU Member Looks at Guyana, Nazis, and Pornography." *Cultic Studies Journal* 4 (1): 1-7.

Weightman, Judith. 1983. *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1988. *The Reconstruction of American Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University.

Jonestown and Bishop Hill: Continuities and Disjunctures in Religious Conflict

by John R. Hall

In northern Illinois, the traveler who takes the byway to the quiet hamlet of Bishop Hill will find it difficult to imagine the streets as they were one spring day in 1850, filled with an angry mob that terrorized innocent citizens and threatened to burn the entire town to ashes. There is justifiably great pride in the accomplishments of the Swedish immigrant communal religious colony that was once Bishop Hill, so it is especially difficult to understand that community as the object of collective rampage. Yet Bishop Hill was born of religious conflict in the old country, and in the new world, its leader, Eric Janson, died of an assassin's bullet born of conflict between the community and the outside.

In 1977, a migration of quite a different utopian religious social movement left its "Babylon" (as Janson called his native Sweden) for the shores of another land. Like Janson's group, their hopes were of following their way of life free from the controversies that stormed around them in the old country. Led by Jim Jones, some 1000 members of Peoples Temple left California for what Jones called their Promised Land — the colony of Jonestown, in the socialist republic of Guyana on the northeast coast of South America. A little over a year after the migration came the murders and mass suicide at Jonestown. Even today the stigma hangs over those events so strongly that it is difficult for us to gain perspective on what happened.

In what follows, I seek to pinpoint the continuities and the different outcomes of religious conflict in Bishop Hill and Jonestown.[1] To compare Jones' Peoples Temple with Eric Janson's Bishop Hill may seem like a long reach, and even unfair: over a century apart in time, one a heretical Lutheran sect of immigrant Swedes from a part of the world where industrialization had hardly begun, the other, interracial blacks and whites fleeing a heartland of industrialization; one group, communitarian capitalists, the other, religiously anti-capitalist political communists, ending its existence in the terrible collective act of mass suicide. Yet it is my contention that these differences were not fundamental ones, but details of setting and differences in outcome that nevertheless bespeak a single general plot: the flight of an apocalyptic sect to establish a promised land. Certainly there are other 19th century groups, like the Mormons, whose history might seem to yield sharper parallels to Jonestown. But precisely because Bishop Hill and Jonestown seem so different on the surface, yet share a common dynamic, their comparison can help alert us to the general character of religious conflict between apocalyptic communal social movements and their detractors in society at large.

Continuities in Religious Conflict

Both Eric Janson and Jim Jones founded religious communities in ways that fit the general model of what I have termed the "apocalyptic sect."[2] Such groups, typically founded by charismatic leaders, establish a radical separation between themselves and the established social world, which they regard as hopelessly evil. Logically, there are two directions of development that such a group might take. One approach is to flee "this" world to found a "city on a hill" that offers a tableau of heaven brought down to earth. The other, more revolutionary, approach is to take on a holy war to try to vanquish the infidels from dominion over the world where they exercise their evil ways. In practice, these ideal typical distinctions sometimes are conflated, especially when believers who want to flee "this" world find themselves embroiled in conflict with their detractors. Such was the case with followers of both Eric Janson and Jim Jones.

Both Jones and Janson were men who came upon their callings outside the formal frameworks of institutionalized religion — Janson in the *lasare* (layreader) conventicles in Lutheran Sweden, Jones in street

preaching and the Pentecostal revival circuit. Each felt the inner gifts of spirit that discount the learned positions of mere scholastics, and each held out to his followers the promise of a salvation that was more difficult to come by in the established corridors of religion. Janson and Jones each came very close to claiming that he was the Second Coming. Converts, many of them disillusioned with the institutionalized churches of their day, flocked into the arms of these two men, but in neither case were they most often from the higher ranks of society; instead, though each attracted some highly competent and effective associates, they found their successes largely among the common folk and, to some extent, the dispossessed. And though they couched it in slightly different terms (of anti-intellectual perfectionism for Janson and the inner light of "god socialism" for Jones), the two men held out to their followers the possibility that they too could be filled with the power of inward grace. Both men claimed the power to heal, and each one told his followers that whoever fell sick somehow was displaying a lack of faithfulness to the cause. Those who left the fold, they warned their flock, would lose the protection of the group's dispensation, and evil would befall them. Those who stayed would prosper in grace and in the mission to which they were called, which in both cases required abandoning their countries of birth and setting off for a colony organized along Pentecostal communalist lines in a new land.

 Understandably, when these men proclaimed their prophetic missions in their native countries, not every citizen or religious functionary saw things their way. By any conventional definition, they were heretics: Janson in Sweden for holding "illegal" meetings of lay preaching and for burning the books of Martin Luther, Jones for slamming the Bible on the floor and ranting on about the "lies" in this "black book." But they were more than heretics. They were religious revolutionaries in the style of Thomas Munzer, men who wanted to turn the tables on the social and religious establishments of their day. Understandably, Janson and Jones often met pitched resistance, and on more than one occasion they both seem to have cultivated it. Each was adept at the psychodrama of religious conflict. Each took persecution precisely as a sign that his cause was just, and each pointed to the acts of opponents as proof that his persecutors were so filled with evil as to be unable to confront the clear light of truth.

 For their detractors, matters came to be just as clearcut, but from different points of view. Some who heard Jones and Janson in their native lands simply believed they were wrong, perhaps deluded. But

others came to see them as significant threats to the social order, and they puzzled over whether these two men were mentally deranged megalomaniacs who happened upon religion as a convenient foil for madness. In the case of Jones, in hindsight, the event of mass suicide would offer ready evidence used to lend support to this view. More cynical critics saw the economic side of things. Despite the lack of evidence that either Janson or Jones was a charlatan out for personal gain, this was precisely the charge of opponents who suspected that each man was out to rob gullible believers by offering them pie in the sky.[3]

The central charge of opponents in both cases, however, centered not on money or insanity, but on religious heresy that captured vulnerable seekers in its snare. Both Eric Janson and Jim Jones lived amidst swirls of charges concerning sexual impropriety (much closer to the mark in Jones' case, but still attaining the status of legend). Both men were charged with using, in the words of a Swedish archbishop, "demonic" psychic powers on followers who were "bewitched" by the "gift of speech."[4] For the outsiders who rose up in opposition to Jones and to Janson, more was at stake than just theological ideas; they took up a battle for their congregations, for members of their families, for their country.

In neither case did the prophet's opponents find themselves strong enough on their own to counter the heretical religious social movement, but in each case the need to do so rose to the fever pitch of a zeal as compelling as the zeal of the heretics themselves. Both Janson and Jones found themselves ready targets of a press that often seemed to see events through the eyes of their detractors alone, and both men found opponents using the legitimated power of state authority to criminalize their actions. In each situation, the beleaguered prophet tried political ploys of his own to avoid arrest and conviction, and, failing to solve problems despite the proclaimed power of his cause, each led a collective migration to found a communal colony in a foreign land. This course of action could be expected to solve several problems at once; it would help solidify a committed cadre of followers, allow escape from the travails of conflicts with opponents, and attain the sanctuary of a heaven-on-earth.

Yet the dream of a heaven-on-earth and the reality of pioneering came to very different things in both groups. Janson and his flock followed the movement of other Swedes to Illinois. In the Jansonists' 1840s migration from Sweden, some 350 men, women and children died

in trans-Atlantic voyages or in the United States. Cholera that rampaged through the Bishop Hill colony in the early years took the lives of 200 more.[5] Despite the difficulties, Bishop Hill prospered as an economy organized according to Pentecostal ideas of collective property, centered on farming, weaving, and petty production for trade. At Jonestown, medical care was more advanced, but the soil was much less fertile, and during its brief history, the colony in Guyana did not get established economically the way Bishop Hill had, though its efforts were directed along similar lines of farming and craft production.[6]

At both Bishop Hill and Jonestown, a strong regimen of heavy toils accompanied by the seemingly endless exhortations of a fearless leader left many immigrants disabused of whatever motives had brought them there.[7] Outside relatives suspected the worst. In each case, family members left behind in the migration charged that the contents of letters back to them had been monitored, so that they could not tell the true conditions under which their relatives lived. There were defections at both Bishop Hill and at Jonestown, and in each case there were some outside family members who were willing to go to great lengths to rescue their loved ones from a path they deemed lost, even though, again in each case, the loved ones who were the objects of rescue attempts did not always appreciate the efforts on their behalf. The latter individuals had acted of their own free will, they typically would maintain, and not, as their relatives believed, under the hypnotic influence of a charlatan. At both Bishop Hill and Jonestown, this kind of conflict over the allegiance of followers was the axis on which history turned. In both cases, such conflict set in motion events leading to the deaths of the leaders, and in the case of Jonestown, 917 other people also perished. The parallels of tragic religious conflict can be understood most easily by considering the events of each case.

The Assassination of Eric Janson

At Bishop Hill, the conflict between Janson's followers and antagonists among the citizens of Illinois came to a head nearly six years after the Mormon leader Joseph Smith had been attacked and murdered at the Carthage jail near his Illinois colony settlement of Nauvoo. Frontier Illinois was known to be able to raise mobs to action, and if they could claim to take justice into their own hands, so much the

better.[8] At Bishop Hill, the volatile issue of family ties versus allegiance to religion was an enduring problem,[9] and one incident became an occasion for a mob.

The protagonist, John Root, was a man of Swedish descent, though he was not one of the Bishop Hill immigrants. Root seems to have been a bit of the gallant: of upper-class bearing, but an adventuring riverboat traveler who claimed glories of a military man, he made his way up the Mississippi River and happened into the colony of Bishop Hill in 1848, where he set upon courting Charlotta Lovisa, a 26-year-old cousin of Eric Janson. Root and "Lotta" were married in November 1849 with a marriage contract that, according to Lotta, included the statement: "If it should happen that John Root should lose his faith and wish to leave the colony, I as his wife have complete right to stay with my friends and relatives as long as I wish, without any interference from him."[10]

John Root never seems to have been too taken with the religious and communitarian life of Bishop Hill. He really didn't belong in the colony and disappeared for months at a time, hunting with rifle and bowie knife and, rumors had it, perhaps murdering a Jewish peddler whose company he had taken up.[11] Soon enough Root concluded that he and his wife and a recently born son should leave Bishop Hill, perhaps in part to escape the cholera epidemic raging there. He knew Lotta did not want to leave, but he was shocked when she refused to depart with him. Root was an overbearing man, maybe even given to abusive violence, and it is possible that Lotta feared being alone with the man for her personal safety. Moreover, Lotta spoke only Swedish, and by leaving, would have isolated herself from relatives, friends and an ethnic enclave. As if the young woman could not have valid reasons of her own to want to avoid departure, outsiders speculated that she was held captive under the sway of Eric Janson's preaching of damnation for defectors. One letter to an editor actually foreshadowed modern deprogramming ideas, asserting the line of reasoning that Root might have followed: "He thought that if she could be removed from under his [Janson's] influence for a time, to a clearer atmosphere, where her mind could regain its natural balance, she would be perfectly satisfied and happy to live with him."[12]

Lotta Root's decision enraged her husband, and on March 2, 1850, he engaged an accomplice to help him take the woman and their child away from Bishop Hill by force. The plot was foiled in a showdown on the way out of town, but then John Root contrived to have his wife show

up in court in the town of Cambridge, and from there he abducted her to the house of Lotta's sister in Chicago. Here Root was foiled again, for the two sisters colluded with men from Bishop Hill and arranged an escape back to the colony.

Unable to obtain the custody of his own wife and son, John Root was now beside himself with talk of revenge and suicide. On March 26, in the town of Cambridge, Illinois, he managed to raise a frontier mob sympathetic to his cause. Root marched them over to Bishop Hill to demand that the colony residents bring forth not only his wife and son, but Eric Janson as well. When the objects of their search were not to be found, the fired-up crowd lay siege to Bishop Hill for three days.

Janson had faced this sort of conflict with outsiders before, in Sweden, and he believed that sometimes it was better to disappear than to make a counterproductive stand. He fled to St. Louis with Lotta Root, her son, and a handful of supporters. While there, Lotta Root swore out an affidavit asserting that she had left her husband "voluntarily" and "on account of ill treatment and abuse," not because of any influence of her family and friends at Bishop Hill.[13] The group only returned to Bishop Hill when the danger from mob action had well subsided.

Less than a month after his return from exile, Eric Janson was called to court in Cambridge as the colony's defendant in several lawsuits. He seems to have believed that this was the end, telling worshipers on Sunday, May 12, 1850 that his next communion would be "new in my father's kingdom."[14] Monday was court day, and when a follower named Richard Mascall pulled up to the Janson house with a buggy to take Bishop Hill's leader to Cambridge, Janson came down the steps asking, "Well, Mr. Mascall, will you stop the bullet for me today?"[15] Janson remained in the courtroom during a recess, looking out the window. He heard his name called out and turned to find John Root. After some heated words in Swedish, Root fired off two shots from a pistol, one of them to Eric Janson's heart. The man who many times had outwitted his assailants had chosen not to avoid this one. He was dead in five minutes.

John Root was convicted of manslaughter rather than murder, on the grounds that his was a crime of passion. Illinois' governor pardoned Root before he served his full two-year term, but Root died a few years later, seemingly overwhelmed and spent by his life's fateful turn. Lotta Root had divorced her husband while he was in prison, and she lived out her life to the age of eighty on a farm two miles from Bishop Hill.

With the assassination of Janson, Bishop Hill had undergone a

charismatic crisis of succession. Once it was settled in favor of Jonas Olson, a religious leader who opposed hereditary succession, the community prospered for a number of years. Indeed, financial prosperity required the drafting of a charter for the collective holding of property, and it was a financial crisis in 1857, stemming from speculative actions of a charter trustee, that led to demands for individualization of property. By 1862 Bishop Hill no longer could be called a communal society, but its transformation had other causes than the assassination of its founder.[16]

The Suicide of Jim Jones and His Followers

The end of the colony at Jonestown will always have greater notoriety than the story of Eric Janson's end, but the events may not ever be any better understood. It is widely known that Congressman Leo Ryan of California visited the community in Guyana in 1978, that he found some fifteen residents who wished to return to the U.S. with him, and that as the group was preparing to depart the Port Kaituma airstrip on November 18, they were attacked, and Ryan and four others killed by sharpshooters from Jonestown.

Back at Jonestown, a tape recorder caught the words as Jim Jones cried out to the assembled residents, "If we can't live in peace, let's die in peace!"[17] One woman offered vigorous dissent, but she was drowned out by others. A man came forward to tell Jones, "We're all ready to go. If you tell us we have to give our lives now, we're ready. All the sisters and brothers are with me." As Jones exhorted them to what he called "revolutionary suicide," nurses dispensed Fla-Vor-Aid laced with cyanide and tranquilizers to over nine hundred men, women and children, about 70 percent black, the remainder white. Jones himself died of a gunshot wound to the head, an apparent suicide. His personal nurse, the daughter of a United Methodist minister, took her own life too, scrawling out in a note, "We died because you would not let us live in peace."

Certainly young children at Jonestown did not knowledgeably take their own lives, and no doubt there were adults herded into the mass death. Yet it seems evident that most adults had been steeled to accept the possibility of martyrdom, and they accepted Jones' definition of Ryan's visit as the moment of truth. Popular accounts of the event are hard put to explain it, because they cannot accede to the possibility that the

members of the community had any possible rationale for their ghastly action.[18] Without such rationale, the event would have to be understood as the machinations of a madman, not as mass suicide, but as mass murder.

Yet Jones and his most loyal followers believed in what they did. For them it was, as one member claimed, "better even to die than to be constantly harassed from one continent to the next."[19] Whereas Eric Janson's detractors in Sweden had not followed him to the new world, Jones and his followers kept fleeing from opponents, searching out the next promised land, only to find their opponents coming after them.

Jones founded Peoples Temple in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the 1950s, but Indianapolis was not receptive to desegregation, and Jones and some 70 families migrated to the rural California community of Redwood Valley in 1965, in hopes of finding a more hospitable clime for an interracial, socialistic congregation. There, and eventually in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Peoples Temple prospered, despite its controversial program. Most of the time Temple staff succeeded at cultivating positive news coverage, and the growing movement attracted the praise of numerous politicians seeking their support. But publicity and government investigations also were the Temple's undoing in the U.S. Peoples Temple faced the same problems Eric Janson and other leaders of deviant religious social movements had faced in earlier religious migrations: opponents accused them of a confidence racket, brainwashing, and kidnapping. In the case of Peoples Temple, political, religious and family opponents became aligned through publicity in the mass media. After a negative *San Francisco Examiner* news article in 1972, the Temple took steps to establish an agricultural colony in Guyana. In the summer of 1977, in the midst of concerns about Internal Revenue Service investigations and a second wave of negative publicity generated by the opponents, Jones and a group of some 1,000 followers left for Guyana *en masse*. After the migration, the opponents formed a countermovement group, the Concerned Relatives, and mounted an intensive legal and public relations campaign against Jones, hoping, as Peoples Temple staff learned, that Jim Jones would overreact to their efforts and give the opponents cause to demand direct exercise of authority by the government of Guyana over the effectively autonomous community.[20] The opponents' cause rested on the charge that people at Jonestown were being kept from their own loved ones. Though specific applications of this charge typically ignored questions of legal custody and the right of adults to privacy (even from their own

relatives), nevertheless the relatives managed to attract a powerful sympathy for their plight among certain segments of the U.S. public.

The most celebrated case, indeed, the symbolic centerpiece of the conflict, was a child whom Jim Jones claimed as a biological son, John Victor Stoen, born to Grace Stoen. The child's legal parents, Grace and Timothy Stoen, had left him behind with Peoples Temple: first Grace separated from her husband and defected from the Temple with a boyfriend; later, Tim Stoen defected from a Temple house in Georgetown, Guyana, while the boy remained in Jonestown. In Peoples Temple's possession were signed documents placing legal custody in the hands of Temple members. John Victor had been raised communally, and leaving him behind may have made sense within the communal calculus of Peoples Temple. From the outside, though, it appeared that the legal parents had abandoned their son to a cult. After Tim and Grace Stoen both were on the outside, they aligned themselves with other opponents and began a relentless struggle to salvage their own honor from the stigma of earlier actions.

Once the Temple's opponents put forward the argument that Jones brainwashed people and held them against their will, they created in their own minds a license to rescue their loved ones, whether those loved ones wanted to be rescued or not. Eventually the frustrations of legal battles and resistance to their efforts from their own relatives at Jonestown led the opponents to conclude that they could only win individual battles by winning the larger war. Their goal, as one opponent was heard to say, became nothing less than to "dismantle" Jonestown, [21] and it was this goal that led to recruitment of Congressman Leo Ryan to their cause.

Far from an independent congressman engaged in an objective investigation, Ryan was a man whose family already had lost members to other so-called cults. He already had tried to take action against cults in Congress, and he unambiguously had declared his allegiance with the Concerned Relatives. From the Jonestown viewpoint, the expedition of Ryan and the delegation of Concerned Relatives to Jonestown in November of 1978 was one step in the larger plan to "dismantle" their community. For the faithful among the Jonestown residents, Congressman Ryan amounted to an external authority allied with their enemies. They saw his visit as orchestrated to establish a warrant for shutting down the community into which they had invested their whole lives and fortunes. When Ryan obtained defections that the opponents could ballyhoo, Jones believed that their collective fate had been sealed:

Jonestown had played out all its options for survival as an independent community. Jones and his loyalist followers believed their enemies would not rest in their efforts until they had succeeded in their goal of ending Jonestown's existence. With a congressman at their side and defectors to offer atrocity tales, history seemed to be with the opponents. Refusing to accept this slow destruction of their world by outsiders whom they deemed illegitimate, Jones and his followers took their own revenge against their opponents by murdering Ryan and others at an airstrip. Back at Jonestown they then destroyed their loved ones and themselves by drinking a punch laced with cyanide.

Discontinuities in Religious Conflict

The differences between the histories of Bishop Hill and Jonestown are substantial, but they are differences between unfoldings of the same basic plot. In each case, there was a history of struggles between the community and opponents in society at large, and in each case the struggles became focused on custody of residents of the community. In each case opponents became enraged and frustrated at their inabilities to force their wills on their relatives, and the battle over relatives led to violent conflict.

It is clear that Jones and his followers were more willing than the people of Bishop Hill to use violence, and that the opponents of Jim Jones were less prone to violence than John Root and his Illinois frontier mob. However, the distinction is not so clear cut, for Jones' opponents actually threatened violence against the group and some of them broke the law trying to attain their ends. By now it is clear that the mass suicide cannot be understood independently of the actions of its opponents.[22] The people of Jonestown clearly were steeled to defend their community by use of force against opponents, but they sought to avoid drawing innocent parties like the Guyanese Defense Force into their struggle with the Concerned Relatives and Congressman Ryan. In the end, their most horrendous act of violence, the mass suicide, was directed inwardly, at themselves.

For their parts, Eric Janson and his followers over a century earlier thrived on the controversy that fueled Janson's success as a prophet, and they plotted their moves as though at war. Nor was this conceived in purely non-violent terms: at one point Janson foretold of life in the U.S., "When the time is ripe ... our blood will flow for the sake of

truth in this land of freedom".[23] Janson's statement never was trans-
lated into action initiated by his group, but given his assassination, it
cannot be dismissed as bad prophecy either. More to the point, the
rhetoric of Janson's statement has the messianic roots of apocalyptic
struggle that also can be found in pronouncements by Jim Jones.[24]

In short, both Jonestown and Bishop Hill enjoined religious
conflict that had fundamentally equivalent sources in the gulf that
comes to exist between apocalyptic religious social movements and
society at large. In both cases, moreover, actual violence developed out
of conflicts over the allegiance of group members opposed by their
outside relatives, and in both cases, the leaders remained committed to
the group's definition of the situation, even to the point of death: Janson
assassinated by an outraged and dishonored husband, Jones appar-
ently taking his own life with a pistol at the conclusion of the mass
suicide.

The differences between assassination at Bishop Hill and mass
carnage at Jonestown stem in part from a heightened sense of martyr-
dom in the Guyana colony, partly connected to the siege mentality that
Jones promoted as part of their struggle for socialism. But the most
decisive differences between Bishop Hill and Jonestown derive from (1)
the changed social conditions from one historical epoch to the next, and
(2) from the differential resources of the opposing sides. In the 19th
century, Eric Janson had his Swedish concerned relatives too, but the
voyage to the new world was long and dangerous, and communication,
slow and ineffective. Once Janson and his followers escaped Sweden,
opponents there failed to muster the initiative for a countermovement.
The Concerned Relatives, on the other hand, could fly to Guyana in a
matter of hours. Moreover, even in the face of the Temple's years of co-
opting press and politicians, the opponents adeptly marshalled govern-
mental and mass media resources to their cause.[25] John Root could
raise a mob, but he could not legitimate it. By contrast, the Concerned
Relatives eventually brought the legitimate power of a U.S. congress-
man, reporters, and a television network news crew to their side, and no
matter where Jones and his followers went in this world, their detrac-
tors would not be far behind.

The wider consequences of events at Bishop Hill and at
Jonestown of course were quite different. Janson's assassination seems
to have had little effect, even within the community itself. Jonestown's
murders and mass suicides, on the other hand, came at the peak of a
wave of concern about "cults" in the U.S., and the event undoubtedly

changed the climate, both for new religious movements and for their detractors. What has not disappeared is the messianic apocalyptic sect, whether its provenience be from the political right or the left, or from the New Age. To mention only a few cases, the years since Jonestown have witnessed: the conflict between Bhagwan Rajneesh and detractors in Oregon; the prosecution of the Idaho-based neo-Nazi group — the Order — and of a linked group along the Missouri-Arkansas border — the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA); and the Mormon family standoff in Utah in 1988. Authorities have become increasingly sophisticated in handling incidents involving such groups, yet the very fact that they have done so suggests that Jonestown was not an isolated incident, but the most extreme case of a wider culture of apocalyptic sects in the U.S. that exist in opposition to the established order and beyond its effective legitimate authority.

Notes

1. This interpretive essay draws primarily on two histories of Bishop Hill: the latter-19th century account by Michael A. Mikkelsen, "The Bishop Hill Colony," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, Vol. 10, part 1 (1892), pp. 11-80; and the recent comprehensive study of source materials by Paul Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah: Eric Janson of Bishop Hill* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976). For Peoples Temple, the essay is based on data analyzed in my comprehensive study, John R. Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1987), which contains extensive source citations that are not duplicated here. The Peoples Temple research project was based on five major types of data: (1) original documents of Peoples Temple, its members, and other groups (e.g., the Concerned Relatives; the U.S. Department of State) and individuals, including personal journals, correspondence, reports, financial records, public relations materials, and miscellaneous other materials; (2) original tape recordings of Temple meetings, telephone conversations, interviews, sermons, staff meetings, and other events recorded by Temple staff; (3) personal interviews I undertook in Georgetown, Guyana, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere after November 1978, with certain surviving members of Peoples Temple, certain members of the Concerned Relatives, and various other informed sources such as government officials in the United States and Guyana, and church officials; (4) news accounts, both prior to and after November 1978; and (5) various books and other secondary source materials published after November 1978. I have established an archive containing all unpublished materials used in the research project at the Library of the California Historical Society, San Francisco, California.

2. John R. Hall, *The Ways Out: Utopian Communal Groups in an Age of Babylon* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). Among communal groups, it is particularly the "other worldly" apocalyptic sects that are capable of marshalling high degrees of commitment from their members; see John R. Hall, "Social Organization and Pathways of Commitment: Ideal Types, Rational Choice Theory, and the Kanter Thesis," *American Sociological Review* (forthcoming, 1988).

3. On Janson, see, e.g., Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, p. 84; for Jones, see Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land*, esp. pp. 32-35.

4. Samuel Kamp, q. in Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, p. 88.

5. Adolph B. Benson and Naboth Hedin, *Americans From Sweden.* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1950), pp. 99, 110-111; V. F. Calverton, *Where Angels Dared to Tread* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), p. 120.

6. Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah,* pp. 124-129; Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land,* esp. pp. 235-237.

7. George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1932), pp. 56-66; Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land,* ch. 9.

8. Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, p. 155.

9. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration*, pp. 64-66.

10. Q. in Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, p. 151.

11. Mikkelsen, "The Bishop Hill Colony," pp. 38-39.

12. Anonymous writer to *Gem of the Prairie*, 5/25/1850, q. in Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, p. 153.

13. Q. in Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, p. 159.

14. Q. in Mikkelsen, "The Bishop Hill Colony," p. 42.

15. Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, pp. 161-169.

16. Mikkelsen, "The Bishop Hill Colony," pp. 47-67.

17. Peoples Temple, "Jonestown tape," November 18, 1978, Jonestown pavilion suicide meeting, cassette tape (New York: Creative

Arts Guild, 1979), copy at California Historical Society Library, San Francisco, California.

18. See, e.g., Jeannie Mills, *Six Years With God: Life Inside Reverend Jim Jones' Peoples Temple* (N.Y.: A&W, 1979); Tim Reiterman and John Jacobs, *Raven: The Untold Story of The Reverend Jim Jones and His People* (N.Y.: Dutton 1982); James Reston, Jr., *Our Father Who Art In Hell* (New York: Times Books, 1981).

19. Q. in Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land,* p. 232.

20. Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land,* p. 230.

21. Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land,* p. 233.

22. John R. Hall, "The Impact of Apostates on the Trajectories of Religious Movements: The Case of Peoples Temple," pp. 229-250 in David G. Bromley (ed.), *Falling From the Faith: The Causes, Course, and Consequences of Religious Apostasy* (Beverley Hills, CA: SAGE, 1988).

23. Q. in Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*, p. 135.

24. E.g., q. in Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land,* pp. 205, 218.

25. Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land*, pp. 141-171, 228-232, 246-247.

From Zion to Jonestown and Beyond: Enclaves of Difference

Robert S. Fogarty

In a series of provocative studies, Robert Wiebe has argued that American society in the late 19th century, though "segmented," operated under a set of common assumptions and general principles which fostered both change and continuity. What he called the "units of life" did, in fact, undergo change over time. In the 18th century, the family living in a small community was that unit, whereas by the 19th century, the pace of life had not only quickened, but there were other "units of life" which had their origins in the growth of cities and towns, in the immigrant diaspora which made America more diverse, and in new commercial arrangements which created different patterns of entrepreneurship.

All these forces created a society that seemed to reshape itself in continuous fashion and appeared, at times, to war with itself. It was society that encouraged diversity, and diversity was its guiding principle: "A properly ordered society, therefore, would comprise countless isolated lanes where Americans either singly or in groups, dashed like rows of racers towards their goals. What happened along other tracks might be a matter of intense interest for competitors, for they were all sprinting there, but it was seldom a matter of emulation. Each lane, testing a unique virtue, would trace a unique experience."[1]

According to Wiebe, there were five fundamental conditions in American life which provided the basis for the race and the different "units of life." They were: an expanse of land; cultural diversity; military security; the absence of feudal traditions; and economic abundance. Communal and cooperative societies formed during this period, however, faced in both directions as they both participated in the segmented society and resisted it. On the one hand, they represented an alternative path, a distinct set of values which allowed their members to distinguish themselves from others in the race; yet they hoped others would emulate them. As a rule, they resisted the tendency towards competitive individualism so much in evidence around them. Many who organized and many who joined such groups rejected national models based on elite leadership, on the growing emphasis on professional competence, and on national rather than local values. There were within such groups elements of decentralism, of a resistance to dominant trends, of a search for spiritual values in community. These groups chose to be marginal and organized themselves into collective settlements which promised them a new life, but it further emphasized their marginality.

All of the elements that Robert Wiebe outlined for life in late 19th century America are still in place, despite the massive changes which have taken place. There is still cheap land in the West; there is cultural diversity and a commitment on the part of many to extend it; there is no feudal tradition; people still think they can remake themselves; and there is economic abundance.

Accepting the opportunity granted through America's tradition of religious freedom and condemning the conditions that reduce many of its citizens to poverty and despair, Jim Jones followed in the footsteps of Populist reformers before him. He intended for his Peoples Temple organization to serve both as a model for others to emulate and as an isolated utopia which society, by its very definition, would either ignore or reject. In the bucolic settings of Ukiah, California and in the intensely-urban communities of San Francisco and Los Angeles where his organization made its homes, Jones mastered the political subtleties that gave Peoples Temple great influence and power; yet most of his power manifested itself at the "members only" meetings and services within the society of his own making.

It sounded, and was, persuasive to the radicals who grouped around him. Jones acted as both Svengali and Father Divine for a group that functioned in the midst of a social and sexual revolution. He convinced them that they would enter paradise and find an end to their

millennial dreams; then he led them into the wilderness.[2] Although
that escape to Jonestown from society contains certain elements remi-
niscent of earlier utopian experiments, it was not a typical utopian
community, and it became less so as its relationship to its country of
origin grew more strained and as its internal practices became more
bizarre. Finally, the suicides which ended it destroyed its carefully-
nurtured image as an organization for emulation, alienating even the
survivors who had once followed Jones' beacon.

*

    According to Wiebe, American pluralism, a tradition of political
liberty and a continuing abundance of land allowed some groups to
define themselves by "networks of families and friends or ethnic affili-
ation rather than by categories of skill, by a single core of character
rather than a multiplicity of roles, by the creeds of religious or mystical
truth rather than the codes of an occupation." Individuals defined
themselves by joining a utopian community, they forged a new outlook
by moving West or South, and they rejected the emerging corporate
identity by adopting a new one. Wiebe's assertion that "what they sought
in each instance was an enclave of difference, a small preserve in the
larger system where their special values would have sovereignty"[3] could
be applied equally to the small town, the communal society in late 19th
century America, and, most recently, to Jonestown. All were part of the
main, yet all tried to maintain their island values.
    Even though utopian communities were often ideologically and
socially in opposition to American society, they were, by and large, left
alone to carry out their own destinies and to run their course with a
minimum of interference. There were times, of course, when commu-
nities came into conflict with local attitudes, or with deep-seated social
patterns. Most established themselves on the physical margins of the
American landscape; it was not until 1900 that the first urban commu-
nal societies made an appearance. Certain communities — those that I
have called elsewhere the cooperative colonizers and the political prag-
matists[4] — acted as a conservative force to blunt the call for class action
which was increasingly heard in the 1890s. By opposing such calls and
upholding the ideal of the "common good," they signaled their alle-
giance to an older and more egalitarian society they believed had existed
for a previous generation.
    Within these utopian communities, there were various leader-

ship patterns and an equal number of strategies advocated for achieving a perfected society. There was no one community paradigm, and several co-existed during the same period. The impulse to create new communities has remained a strong one. Wiebe has noted this continuing tradition: "The communitarian impulse of the 19th century and its modifications in the 20th century simply extended this normal American pattern. From New Harmony to Pullman, from exurbia to the student communes, the appropriate means of following a different persuasion were secession and isolation."[5]

While secession was an essential part of both the utopian and the colony building process, complete isolation was always impossible, and there were groups that resisted such withdrawal, striving instead to become centers of social or political influence and culture. Some communal and cooperative groups sought to escape the pressures and developing patterns of late 19th century society and to protest against the forces of consolidation represented by the trusts of organizing themselves into "good trusts." If they could not control the forces at work in the economic sphere, they could constitute themselves into a new moral order where work, family life and social aspirations could be merged.

Yet it must be emphasized again that they did not emanate from a single source, or speak a single language. Henry Demorest Lloyd's description of his own political philosophy, for example, might be used to describe the political sources of the various groups which had a political agenda. He was a "socialist-anarchist-individual-collectivist-individualist-communist-cooperative-aristocratic-democrat."[6]

One might say that Lloyd was confused. However, his confusion represents the varieties of community experience that flourished.

As much as the Lloyds of the period tried to distinguish themselves and chart a different course, they were also wedded to contemporary assumptions about how the good life might be achieved. One finds, for example, that the socialists embraced the economics of abundance, believing that the production of consumer goods and the utilization of new technology would lead to the expansion of the marketplace, but one that was theirs. They realized they had to enter into the world in order to protect their place in it, but they hoped they could infuse it with their values, in a sense to spiritualize the capitalist economy. Despite the rhetoric of social revolution, many cooperators hoped to become as competitive as their neighbors and to sustain traditional individualist values in the name of American "liberty."

Not all who joined sought to change the material world. Theirs

was the politics of adjustment, accommodation, or retreat. These individuals sought salvation in community and solace in an intense religious life. R. Laurence Moore has argued that the distinction between mainline and sect congregations fails to come to grips with the essentially pluralistic and shifting character of American religious life and spiritual development: "What the proliferation [of religious groups] did was provide ways for many people to invest their lives with a significance that eased their sense of frustration. For many, no doubt, that meant coming to terms with, and accepting, social and political powerlessness. For others, it led directly to gaining conventional forms of power in a world that was no longer primarily religious."[7]

This is not the same as identifying sectarian movements as "religions of the oppressed," nor is it saying that cult activity arises simply out of social stress. Rather it means that identification with either cult or church was an expression of religious values in a world where religion was losing its moral potency.

Peoples Temple attracted its following among members of the community who were under stress, who sought religious values, or who, like many of the elderly black recruits, were both. The church letterhead carried Christ's social gospel. The rhythmic sermons of the evangelical preacher mesmerized many Temple adherents, even when Jones denounced the Bible and the Christian God as inadequate when it came to putting food in their stomachs. Increasingly, the promise of social justice and heaven on earth — whether that justice would come about in San Francisco through the Temple's exercise of political and organizational power, whether that heaven could be found in the self-governed community of Jonestown — overwhelmed the Temple's churchly trappings, even as it retained its religious principles.

Similarly, the belief in community and in the possibility of establishing a sanctified band was potent in the 19th century, despite the existence of larger and more powerful movements. These groups did not run in the fast lane, and they had few winners, although they did set, at times, a fast pace, were out in front for a while, and by their sometimes erratic behavior made the whole race certainly livelier and more interesting. Like their predecessors in the 1840s and 1850s, they did not affect the final outcome of the national marathon. But it must be said that they mirrored both dissatisfactions and new possibilities, they contained elements from the mainstream and the margins, they were a compound of radical and conservative notions, and they were more heterodox than orthodox.

One of the most powerful images that one finds in late 19th century literature is the one in *Looking Backward*, Edward Bellamy's 1888 classic. Bellamy describes a "prodigious coach" to which was harnessed the mass of humanity. It was driven up a hilly, sandy road by hunger which "permitted no lagging though the pace was necessarily slow." On top of the coach were passengers who never alighted "even at the steepest ascents." The greatest misfortune for any coach rider was "to lose one's seat, and the apprehension that this might happen to them or their friends was a constant cloud upon the happiness of those who rode."[8] There were others on that road: some had willingly leaped from the coach to walk on foot; others thought the coach was too commercial and sought a more spiritual vehicle. Members of these communal societies elected to move about in caravans, to travel together, to name their own driver and, if they so chose, to take another road.

Two ideals remained powerful during this period: the ideal of the covenanted community of saints, and the township. Establishing a city on the hill still seemed possible, and many tried to do so, some because they had fallen off the coach, others because they had visions which took them down other roads. Yet there was no uniform vision, no uniform way. In "Circumspection of the Topic," his second of ten Gifford "Lectures on Natural Religion" at the University of Edinburgh in 1901 and 1902, William James said that the term religious experience encompassed phenomena "so many and so different from one another; it did not stand for any single principle or essence, but was rather a collective name."[9] They did not arise from the air, although many had an airy quality about them. They grew organically from a utopian tradition which was deeply rooted in American history.

The tradition was reflected most obviously in John Winthrop's speech aboard the Arbella in 1630 when he spoke about the meaning implicit in the colonization of North America: "We must consider that we shall be a City Upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." The early settlers at the Massachusetts Bay Colony were, in the words of Kenneth Lockridge, "conservative, Christian and Utopian."[10] The millennialist assumptions of 18th century settlers and leaders have been repeatedly stressed by commentators on American life.

In his *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville noted the importance of townships — "a middle ground between the commune and the canton of France" — in mediating opposing forces; they were "not so large, on the one hand, that the inhabitants would be likely to conflict, and not so small, on the other, that men capable of conducting

their affairs may always be found among its citizens."[11] Such townships were model political and social environments in France, because they elicited both support *and* participation from citizens. In America, de Tocqueville stressed, they could provide the social glue so essential for a society that had within itself the seeds of social chaos, "because beyond the people, nothing is to be perceived but a mass of equal individuals." Such equality had produced enormous liberty, but there was little which held it together. Within a small settlement, however, it was possible to counteract that tendency, because both collective and individual responsibility were assumed as vital elements in social life. In one sense, many of these new settlements in the post-Civil War period were efforts to create new townships and return to a tradition which emphasized participation, shared symbols, common rituals, and common goals. The ideal of the township was the ideal of the perfected community. Those that were successful had all the characteristics which Rosebeth Kanter notes in utopian communities: sacrifice, investment, renunciation, mortification, and transcendence.[12]

In *Alternative America*, John L. Thomas has argued that the utopian tradition in late 19th century America as exemplified by Edward Bellamy, Henry Demorest Lloyd and Henry George attempted to present a vision on a new America based on a redefined social and political economy. This new model commonwealth drew its inspiration from three separate traditions: the Jeffersonian, the Protestant evangelical, and the artisanal. Jefferson's decentralized society was based on a political model rooted in the township with its freely elected representatives. The evangelical vision took the form of a perfected religious body made up of visible saints aligned against a corrupt civil order. The third, artisanal ideology was grounded in a "philosophy of true producers who formed a naturally cooperative community based on shop floor solidarity."[13]

Bellamy, George and Lloyd were all political economists and publicists who hoped to create "an adversary culture," to use Thomas' phrase, able to combat the growing power of the trusts. In a letter to the Populist-feminist Annie Diggs, Lloyd wrote that "cooperatives, trade unions, farmers, Granges and the churches must supply us with the material for the new social union to which we are moving."[14]

Bellamy's defense of small town virtue and his appeal to form an "Industrial Army" steered a middle course that preserved local values and promoted martial efficiency. George's Single Tax plan offered the way out for agricultural and urban producers alike. For George, the

proper distribution of wealth would enable men to maintain their independence and integrity, while also allowing village life to flourish for a middle class which was then torn between two forces: the rising metropolis and the bonanza farm. According to Thomas, George believed that the essence of American liberties remained linked with small towns and local government. Town and country might be joined to create an industrial village where a true community of interests reigned, rather than the contemporary and growing community of calculation, commodities, and land speculation. Although both George and Lloyd distrusted state socialism, they shared millennialist assumptions about the possibility of a perfected society based on Christian ethics and salvationist prophecy.

Though it is often asserted that utopian writers and colony builders operated in different worlds, there is considerable evidence that during the half century between 1860 and 1914, they shared a set of common concerns. There was, in fact, a common faith, a common sensibility, and a series of characteristics shared by the literary utopianists and the practical communists. One was their belief in the inevitable historical development of society towards a cooperative state. That development was based on man's progressive nature, on his ability to overcome social obstacles, and his desire for a higher and more spiritual life. Both *Looking Backward* and Kimsey Owen's journals[15] focus on community as the place where superior values would be put into practice. True community could emerge if mankind conquered its lower instincts, its propensity towards aggressiveness, and its desire to dominate others.

A second shared belief was that the frontier still offered both land and social space for launching new ventures. The settling of Kansas and Colorado in the 1860s and 1870s involved both individual and collective patterns, and beginning in the 1880s, California exerted a strong pull on the imagination of these paradise planters. Clearly the continuing availability of cheap land played a major part in the colony plans, but one also sees that some communities advertised the attractions of the climate, the fruitfulness of the land, and the garden which cooperators would settle and help bring to blossom.

Another significant element was the "patent-office model" approach which Arthur Bestor, Jr., noted was the major characteristic of the earlier Owenite and Fourierist movements. It centered on the belief that communal and cooperative settlements could serve as social labo-

ratories, and that by experimenting on a small scale, the reformers might teach the larger world some lessons. [16]

Fresh opportunity, fresh land, and fresh ideas fueled the spirit of community development. George feared what the disappearance of free land would mean for the American psyche: "The Single Tax and the millennium it pictured," writes Thomas, "offered an escape from the confinements of time and indeterminancy in a simple device for restoring strength and purpose by returning Americans to the soil."[17] Land — cheap land — was still available despite what George, and later Turner, argued, and it was taken up by communal settlers. It was not until 1900 and the "Straight Edge Society" that one sees the city embraced as a locus of cooperative activity. Village life was, until that time, the dominant utopian mode.

There was a curious mixture of idealism and opportunism evident in some schemes, particularly in the 1890s when land development plans and socialist hopes came together. As historians have noted, the rise of insurance schemes was clearly related to the uncertainties of the age. "Security" played a large part in the appeal that certain groups had, particularly to workingmen and their families. Many families sought a caring community in a world where economic chaos ruled. A secure future in a new land was a theme used by not only the cooperative colonizers and the political pragmatists, but by the charismatic perfectionists who offered a secure grounding with a holy person and a body of religious believers. Jewish communards came to the American West, because it offered them what Czarist Russia could not: bread and land. Beyond that, the Am Olam movement was motivated by a millennialist vision rooted in socialism and the creation of a special place for Jews. Its idealistic and practical elements were complementary.

The romance of socialism also included a variety of plans to lighten the burden of industrial labor. One of those schemes was the cooperative plan outlined by Walter Thomas Mills in his *Product Sharing Village*.[18]Variations on that theme were in evidence in the 1870s and 1880s, reaching their peak of popularity between 1887 and 1896. Tied closely to the industrial problem was the urban problem. It was, however, more clearly stated as a problem in ethics and morality than a problem in economics. Elizabeth Rowell Thompson's concern about the fate of urban children led to the creation of the mystical community of Shalam in New Mexico, one that agitated spiritualists and socialists alike. But it was the spiritual dimension of the problem that concerned

her. The view that cities were places of corruption did not arise simply out of the industrial crises of late 19th century America: it was derived from a Jeffersonian world view.

Mystical dreamers, inspired prophets and radical visionaries have always played a large part in the utopian tradition. Looking backwards over this period, it is obvious that God, or the "Oversoul," continued to speak to would-be communal leaders as frequently as before. Thomas Lake Harris' inspiration was found in the Swedenborgian dream mansion and continued to sustain his settlement into the 1890s. Cyrus Teed, Charles Sandford and Benjamin Purnell were all different personalities and clearly appealed to different religious constituencies, but appeal they did. One does see the spiritualist and Eastern-oriented belief systems take on a more prominent role at the century's end with such romantic figures as Katherine Tingley, Jacob Beilhart and George Littlefield all influenced by books and ideas from mystical realms. Laurence Veysey has documented this mystical shift by looking at the Vedanta movement and its appeal to upper class women. Zen Buddhism was an arcane and exotic belief system in the year 1900; today it is a growing part of the American alternative religious scene.

There were quirky visions — mirrored by Jim Jones 70 years later — which were a compound of private and Biblical inspiration. One of the sculptural visions was of a black primitive artist whose throne construction, the New Jerusalem, maintains its grandeur and dignity. Some were gerry-built affairs. Others, such as William Frey's Positivism, were rational and formal. John Thomas describes all these visions as being part of an oppositional culture which in its most rational form was led by Lloyd, Bellamy and George: "Here was the oppositional culture that the utopian codified for an entire late nineteenth century community comprised of displaced artisans and mechanics; small tradesmen and local entrepreneurs; yeoman families particularly in the South; and increasing numbers of European immigrants at one or two removes from the soil and bringing with them memories of a communal life and its traditions."[19]

The Jonestown settlement can be seen in the same light: dubbing itself an "Agricultural Mission," it returned elderly blacks living in San Francisco to the humid climate and harsh soil conditions of their native South; it taught skills to society's misfits and let them teach others, often with makeshift tools and obscure goals; it channeled the

visions of the alienated middle-class whites who comprised the community's second tier of leadership.

We know that those who joined the colony at Burley in Washington had all read Bellamy, George and Gronlund, and the pages of every socialist journal were full of allusions to their work. We know also that the residents of Jonestown studied socialist thought, even if the socialism of Peoples Temple was often defined as a matter of convenience for Jim Jones' latest whim. Although no single text other than Revelations appeared to have inspired the charismatic perfectionists, it is possible to see this oppositional culture from a historical perspective which suggests they were part of a covenanted theory stretching back to 1630, of a thirst for a community that was in evidence in the 1820s, of a grasping for corporate identity which the Temple capitalized upon in San Francisco during the mid-1970s.

Thomas Lake Harris and his disciples moved from New York to Santa Rosa, George Littlefield from the labor battles of Haverhill, Massachusetts to Santa Barbara, Jim Jones from Indiana to Ukiah. All destinations were towns in California. It is not surprising that when the Oneida Community dissolved in the 1880s, a contingent of these utopians left New York and headed for Anaheim. Clearly, California has offered a whole new venue for utopians: it offers land, luxurious scenes and the promise of new things. It was the land Columbus had set sail for in his imagination, a land that promised to release men and women from the shackles of labor, from oppressive government, from hunger and exploitation. Those communards — like many other Americans — found California irresistible.

Utopianism, with the communal settlements which represent one practical expression of it, is a continuous phenomenon which will not be denied. It has flourished in the most unlikely corners of America, drawing its inspiration from sentiments and ideas from both classic dreams and contemporary realities. Such communities allow Americans to experiment in ways both practical and expressive of the process of "novus ordo seclorum," or making the world new again.

Communal groups have been led by healers who promised to make the body whole again as well; they have been led by radical political thinkers who promised to bring the pie in the sky down to earth; they have established communities which offer peace and tranquility to the faithful. There have been successes within this utopian tradition. Jonestown was not one of those successes — Shiva Naipaul has characterized Jonestown as a "journey to nowhere,"[20] and that is an apt descrip-

tion — but it needs to be understood within the American tradition of seeking Zion and journeying westward that started in Jamestown, Virginia.

Freedom might be gained through unity, through cooperative planning and decision-making: freedom for the women at Belton, Texas under Martha McWhirter's dream rule; freedom for the displaced young Englishmen at Rugby; freedom for the spiritualists on Dawn Valcour Island, Vermont, and for the socialists at Equality, Washington.

Today, as Frances FitzGerald notes,[21] Americans seek freedoms in different enclaves, from the retirement communities of Sun City, Florida to the gay district of San Francisco around Castro Street, from the short-lived transformation of Antelope Valley, Oregon into Rajneeshpuram while followers of the Eastern guru constituted a majority of the area's population, to the Liberty Baptist Church of Jerry Falwell.

FitzGerald's contemporary errand into the wilderness took her to these four distinct enclaves. Two were religious — the Liberty Baptist Church and Rajneeshpuram — and two social — the Castro District of San Francisco, and Sun City, Florida. Four communities, four philosophies, four forces, four lines. "Looked at in one way," FitzGerald writes, "they formed a kind of parallelogram." In contrast, the lines she followed in *Fire in the Lake*, about American involvement in Vietnam, created a hexagram made up of eight trigrams representing images and states of being that intersect at the corners, stand in opposition to one another and are defined by the obtuse and acute angles they create. Her parallelogram metaphor may have been taken from Robert Owen's notion that his ideal village houses were to be arranged to form such a figure; her four movements may have come from that other 19th century utopian Charles Fourier, whose *The Social Destiny of Man, or the Four Movements* sparked communal thinking in America.

In visiting these four communities between 1978 and 1985, FitzGerald followed the fault lines created by social and political pressures that had erupted with great force in the 1960s, and came to believe that these communities represent the genuine revolutions of our time, particularly when they touch on sexuality and life expectancy. While it seemed to many that America had lost its center and was coming apart, FitzGerald saw the changes as a re-emergence of the forces that had created the "burned-over" district of New York from 1830 to 1860: revivalism, spiritualism, utopian societies, town development, and feminism.

*

FitzGerald's first "city" is the Castro District nestled in one of those glorious urban valleys that gives San Francisco so much of its charm and character. It is an area with old homes, hills, lovely views and moderate weather. It is also a cultural and sexual enclave, and FitzGerald details its shapes (all those slim hips), its problems (the AIDS epidemic), its politics (the late Harvey Milk, assassinated ten days after the Jonestown suicides), its narcissistic style, and the extraordinary fact of its very existence. She understands that for many it is truly a "liberated zone," a place of significant human drama, particularly in light of the AIDS specter.

Sun City is a parallel image of the Castro. It is an "age segregated" Florida community of 8500 residents, all over sixty, even if many of them try to look younger. A self-contained city in the midst of scrub land, it has everything its citizens need, including several golf courses. Built by a developer in the mid-1960s, the retirement village attracts people with incomes between $21,000 and $29,000, drawn mostly from the Middle West and from the middle management ranks of American corporations, small businesses and the professions. They are white and Protestant.

After twenty years of existence, the community includes many two-generation families, usually a mother-daughter combination with the elder in her eighties living in a nursing home, the younger just past sixty and freshly installed in a condominium. What binds all the residents together is their pursuit of the "active" life: they are hobbyists, collectors, joiners.

The inhabitants of Sun City are more conventional than the residents of the Castro, but both groups are alike in their knowledge that death may be just around the corner. The result, as FitzGerald quotes one Sun City resident as saying, is, "I think people here have a different attitude toward death from people in a mixed community. There is a greater sense of acceptance. People don't dwell on it much. They think about how to have fulfilling lives."

Lynchburg, Virginia is an altogether different community, though it is the kind of town that Sun City people might have come from. Set in the rolling hills of Virginia, it is a pleasant, medium-sized town of 67,000 with a large minority population, a minor league baseball team, several colleges and little unemployment. The dull, decent town is distinguished by its numerous churches — over 100 — and by one in

particular: the Thomas Road Baptist Church, the center of the religious empire headed by the Rev. Jerry Falwell. Visitors come from all over the U.S. to hear Falwell and to see his college, the Liberty Baptist College.

Most of Falwell's lower middle-class congregation have been "saved" or "born again." They possess a firm belief that fundamentalism is both a living faith and a way of life. Falwell's church is the center of their lives, and they too are busy: busy with Bible classes, fund-raising campaigns, and missionary work, all in addition to their regular jobs. Although many women parishioners have jobs, home is where their hearts are and where their men are still in charge. Those who attend Falwell's services wear double knit suits, rings stamped with mottoes, and, as FitzGerald describes the women, wear "their hair long, loose and — almost uniformly — curled in Charlie's Angels style."

Falwell's angels dress and behave in the style of many evangelical believers, whether in Lynchburg or Tulsa. Their attire represents not only their group values, but also their recently-arrived middle-class status, Southern style.

Secular humanism, pornography and homosexuality are the evils which Falwell believes are engulfing the world, and he warns his followers about them. During his weekly sermon, he regales the congregation with stories about places he has been, the evils he has seen, and the battles he has won for them — and for Christ. For liberal Americans, though, he is the anti-Christ because of his positions on abortion, busing and school prayer.

Falwell's audience is considerably larger than the 2500 who enter his plain and placid church every week. It is through television that he exerts his real influence. His "Old Time Gospel Hour" raised $35 million in 1979, and today stands symbolically for the "electronic church" that has become such a powerful force within American religion.

The mainline churches have been slow to respond to his use of the medium. Scornful of his Armageddon speeches and 1920s theology, they have failed to come up with their own syndicated shows or religious superstars.

Members of the Liberty Baptist Church exhibit a cult-like devotion to their pastor and an unquestioned faith in his mission. Although Falwell's message is an apocalyptic one — much like Jim Jones' — he is less of a flamboyant preacher and more of an earnest salesman. Despite the uniformity of mind that characterizes his followers and his own straight and narrow politics ("If you would like to know where I am

politically, I am to the right of wherever you are. I thought Goldwater was too liberal"), he emerges as affable and engaging: a zealot, but a charming zealot.

Consumed by a vision, driven by restless energy and ambition, he strikes me as a cross between two 19th century figures: Davy Crockett, frontiersman and politician; and Charles Finney, the great revivalist and religious entrepreneur. Both Crockett and Finney liked the limelight, and created mythologies around themselves. Crockett became a creature of Whig politics, Finney a religious innovator. Both, like Falwell and like Jones, were seen by their contemporaries as half man/half beast.

FitzGerald's final community is also her liveliest: the human potential, mystical, cooperative colony of Rajneeshpuram begun in 1981 in Antelope, Oregon. Most Americans first heard about the commune when the popular television program "Sixty Minutes" ran a segment about it, featuring the Bhagwan's daily "drive-by" in a Rolls Royce through a corridor of believers clad in red leisure togs and pink down jackets. These "sanyasins" came to this "Buddhafield" in central Oregon to be near their guru, and to develop a city on a 100-square mile ranch that his society had purchased for six million dollars. Run by the 33-year-old woman named Ma Ananda Sheela, the colony's membership consisted of Americans and Europeans, most aged between 30 and 50, with professional backgrounds and involvement with the human potential movement. As a group, they were highly educated and arrived at Antelope after a long trip down the human potential road. They knew more about Rolfing than about Tupperware. The community had 600 people in it by 1983, all working hard, playing hard, and basking in the Bhagwan's energy. No ordinary leader, the guru was a transcendental joker and punster who kept his believers merry and open to new influences.

Rajneeshpuram, nee Antelope, was no geodesic hippie palace, but a new town with its own water supply, transportation system and big plans for the future: a New Age, international community made up of upper-class dropouts. It was all too bizarre, too American. Reporters followed devotees to the town, focusing on the growing conflict between the locals and the newcomers. Not since the Mormons took over Nauvoo had there been such a controversy with battles over zoning regulations, town elections, and religion. Initially, the sanyasins were enthusiastic, eager to get along with their neighbors. Paradoxically, while many of them came with training in psychology, they failed to work out any

accommodation with the ranchers and retirees already living there.
Charges of voting fraud, arson, and intimidation were rampant by 1983,
and state officials openly worried they had another Jonestown in the
making.

The crisis came to a head when Ma Ananda Sheela fled to
Europe amidst rumors that she had tried to poison her enemies within
the colony as well as local officials, that she was stockpiling arms, that
she was engaged in wiretapping, and that she had been preparing the
community for a scourge — AIDS — that would engulf the world. There
were stories about secret Swiss bank accounts containing funds she and
her cohorts had embezzled. The Bhagwan broke his silence to reveal that
it had all been done without his knowledge.

It also turned out that the outlandish charges were true. Ma
Ananda Sheela was deported from Germany to face charges ranging
from attempted murder to immigration fraud. She was eventually
convicted.

By 1985, the sanyasins had abandoned Rajneeshpuram, their
leader was deported, and the accountants and lawyers were left to pick
over the shards. Since leaving Oregon, the Bhagwan has been virtually
stateless, traveling to India, Nepal, Crete and Ireland in search of a
smaller Buddhafield.

*

The Castro, Liberty Baptist Church, Sun City, and Rajneeshpu-
ram were four communities, four lines, four forces, four tangents, four
cities on a hill that owe their existence to what I like to call the "stress"
school of American history. The dramatic shifts in recent years of all
facets of American life — demographic, sexual, political and religious
— led FitzGerald to look backward to another stressful period and place:
the 1840s and the burned-over district of New York. Bolstered by this
comparison and the theoretical works of Richard Hofstadter, Victor
Turner and Anthony F. C. Wallace, FitzGerald then posited that we are
now in a liminal stage, a transitional period when new communities
appear in response to new stresses. In the 1840s, it was industrializa-
tion, the emergence of a new middle class, the failure of the Puritan
consensus that led to revivalism and temperance, the Female Mission-
ary Societies, to communes like to Oneida and the Shakers. This search
for *communitas* led people to seek out prophets, to construct new social
realities, to found new settlements: "Revolution is, of course, a directed

change, but when the change is — for a time, at least — undirected, people in transitional states are open and vulnerable to all kinds of ideas."

All this leads me back to the implications of these enclaves — and of the enclave represented by Peoples Temple — as they relate to wider patterns in American life.

First, I cannot think of a period in American history that has not been transitional. Both Crevecouer and deTocqueville noted it fifty years apart, and Robert Bellah has reconfirmed the transitional state in his recent study of individualism and commitment in contemporary America.[22] Second, all of the studies FitzGerald cited presume that there was both more stress in the 1840s than in other periods, and that communal and cooperative societies were founded in direct response to such new conditions. In the process, she ignored much of the history of ideas and failed to acknowledge sufficiently deep-rooted cultural patterns that allow both change and continuity to play off against each other, as well as a whole body of scholarship that takes a different look at social experimentation. American historians Laurence Veysey and R. Laurence Moore and British sociologist Bryan Wilson would have painted a more complex picture of causality than she did.

It can be argued that communal groups have been a constant factor in American life, and that their rise and fall cannot be crudely correlated to economic factors and stress. There is a substantial argument that the alternative visions FitzGerald described are deeply-rooted in America's need for community, that the mysticism she saw is as old as the 18th-century Pennsylvania commune of Ephrata, that America has seen other large-scale demographic shifts — such as the massive immigrations at the turn of the century, or the shift to the suburbs after World War II — and that the country has survived them all.

FitzGerald acknowledged that her choice of communities was haphazard, and that any overlapping — as in the gay/fundamentalist conflict — was coincidental. "Each community worked out its own destiny independent of the others," she wrote. That single comment should tell us that, despite all the stresses and strains, there is still pluralism, there is still social space, there is still change.

The race continues, and as it does, we will see more enclaves of difference in a truly American pattern.

Notes

1. Robert Wiebe, *The Segmented Society* (New York: 1975), p. 19.

2. For an extended discussion of the concept of the communal journey, see my essay "Behold a White Horse!: The Communal Journey" in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 211 - 236.

3. Wiebe, op. cit., p. 59.

4. Robert S. Fogarty, "American Communes, 1865 - 1914," *Journal of American Studies* 9 (August 1975).

5. Wiebe, op. cit., p. 169.

6. Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (New York: 1967), p. 79.

7. R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: 1977), pp. 209 - 210.

8. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (Boston: 1931), pp. 10 - 11.

9. The talks were later published in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The quote is from the London, 1952 edition, p. 27.

10. Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town* (New York: 1970).

11. John Stone and Steve Mennell, eds., Alexis de Tocqueville, *On Democracy, Revolution and Society* (Chicago: 1978), p. 55.

12. Rosabeth Kanter, *Commitment and Community* (Cambridge: 1972).

13. John L. Thomas, *Alternative America* (Cambridge: 1983), p. 365.

14. Ibid., p. 345.

15. Albert Kimsey Owen, *Integral Cooperation* (1885) and *The Credit Foncier of Sinoloa* (1886).

16. Arthur Bestor, Jr., "Patent Office Models of the Good Society: Some Relationships Between Social Reform and Westward Expansion," *The American Historical Review*, 58 (April 1953).

17. Thomas, op. cit., p. 128.

18. Walter Thomas Mills, *Product Sharing Village* (1890).

19. Thomas, op. cit., p. 366.

20. Shiva Naipaul, *Journey to Nowhere* (New York: 1981).

21. Frances FitzGerald, *Cities on a Hill* (New York: 1986).

22. Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* (New York: 1985)

The Second Wave of Jonestown Literature: A Review Essay

Thomas Robbins

The decennial of Jonestown was commemorated with austere warnings about "cults" always lurking and waiting to work their evil among us. Perhaps it is ironic that the actual date of Jonestown, November 18, should be so close to American Thanksgiving, which commemorates the exploits of another deviant religious group which fled persecution into the wilderness. "Rather than an anomalous aberration, Jonestown could appear as a recent instance of a religiopolitical utopianism that was integral to the original colonization of America and that has surfaced periodically throughout American history," comments David Chidester (1988:165).

The ten-year anniversary also saw the publication of personal accounts and political analyses of the tragedy, including Rebecca Moore's *The Jonestown Letters*, the correspondence of two sisters who died at Jonestown with their parents (Moore, 1987), her volume of essays entitled *In Defense of Peoples Temple* which examines the response of the government, the media and the opponents of Jim Jones to the Jonestown community (Moore, 1988), and a monograph in the CIA conspiracy genre (Meiers, 1988).

(Ed. note: This essay was originally combined with "The Historical Antecedents of Jonestown: The Sociology of Martyrdom," printed elsewhere in this volume, and represents a substantial expansion of an earlier version, "Reconsidering Jonestown" published in Religious Studies Review.)

The focus of the present paper will be primarily on two recent sociological works on the Peoples Temple. *Salvation and Suicide* (Chidester, 1988) and *Gone From the Promised Land* (Hall, 1987) are both highly provocative monographs. Their treatment of the Peoples Temple movement and its tragedy is more comprehensive, particularly John Hall's volume, and more attuned to theoretical issues in social science, particularly David Chidester's monograph, than are earlier works by social scientists. Both works also make a significant contribution in terms of their sensitivity to the historical or comparative-generic aspect of any attempt to understand the Jonestown catastrophe, i.e., they are attuned to the significance of meaningful comparisons which might be made between Jonestown and other collective suicide events in history. We will be somewhat concerned with this dimension in this essay, and we will venture our own comparison of Jonestown with two earlier episodes in a separate essay in this volume.

Before turning to these two very recent monographs, the following is a brief commentary on earlier studies of the Peoples Temple and the Jonestown tragedy.

The "First Wave"

"In our culture we have not done well in coming to terms with the cultural legacy of Jonestown," comments John Hall in *Gone From the Promised Land* (1987:303). Surprisingly, rather little sociological and social science analysis of the ill-fated Peoples Temple was published in the first seven or eight years after the spectacular cataclysm. The present writer lacks familiarity with the theological and religious studies evaluations of Jonestown (e.g., Rose, 1979; Smith, 1982), or with the full corpus of psychiatric and psychological analyses and clinical studies directly pertinent to the Peoples Temple (e.g., Kroth, 1984; Lasaga, 1980; Lifton, 1979; Ulman and Abse, 1983). Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s, notwithstanding hundreds of articles, papers and monographs on "new religious movements" and "cults",[1] sociologists and scientific students of religion had produced only one short monograph (Weightman, 1983), a reader (Levi, 1982) and a handful of articles dealing specifically with the Peoples Temple and its spectacular holocaust. These works might be termed the *first wave* of Jonestown studies. It appears now, a decade after the terrible event at Jonestown, a *second*

wave of research and reevaluation is now breaking. Among the second wave of Jonestown works are the two monographs to be discussed in this paper.

A seminal article by John Hall (1981) developed an incisive analysis which is extrapolated in the final chapter of his monograph, and which focused on the ambiguity of Jim Jones' movement in which the political revolutionary ("warring sect") and religious ("other-worldly sect") dimensions of the movement partly cancelled each other out and undercut the movement's accommodation to intractable reality. An unpublished paper by Chidester (1983) presented a general phenomenological theory of collective religious suicide, which entails responses to subhuman/superhuman classifications of persons and groups. This interpretation is amplified and extended in his new volume

A third outstanding analysis was formulated by Johnson (1979), who delineated the working out of "dilemmas of charisma" in the last few years of the Peoples Temple. Jones' responses to a number of developments which potentially undercut his charismatic authority created new difficulties such that the Temple became locked into a spiraling process of intensifying authoritarian control and paranoid boundary-maintenance. Lifton (1979) also focused on the destabilizing effects of an institutionally unfettered interaction between an adulated guru-prophet and his worshipful devotees. More recently, Wallis (1984:103-118) discussed the Temple and several other movements such as Synanon and the Children of God in terms of the "precariousness of charisma" and its implications for the intensification over time of a group's volatility and potential for violence (see also Melton, 1985 and Wallis and Bruce, 1986:115-128).

Since 1978 a hortatory literature which sees the Jonestown tragedy as an object lesson on the threats of mind control in cults has flourished (e.g., Yanoff, 1984). Nevertheless, an analysis by Richardson (1980) highlights a number of key differences between the Temple and other controversial cults in terms of organizational structure, ideology, patterns of resocialization, general worldview, and ritual behavior. Yet Jones' movement was similar to many other contemporary movements in terms of an organizational totalism which consumed participants in a "perverse utopia" (Coser and Coser, 1979). Wooden (1981) delineates the financial exploitation and treatment of children by the Temple and concludes his volume with attacks on cultist "brainwashing" and the financial non-accountability of churches. But the vast majority of communal, authoritarian, charismatically led, world-rejecting and puta-

tively mind-controlling cults do not produce spectacular mass suicides. What was special about the Peoples Temple?

John Hall's explicit theory (1981, 1987) on this score is discussed below; however, the earlier version of his analysis of the Peoples Temple (1981) has been applied by Robbins (1986) to mass suicides among the Old Believers in 17th century Russia (see also Chidester, 1983 and my paper, "The Historical Antecedents of Jonestown" in this volume), although the degree of persecution was certainly greater in Tsarist Russia. In her useful monograph, Weightman (1983) argues that the Peoples Temple might be viewed as two movements: a white middle class "new religion," and a largely black lower-class "cult." A socially idealistic elite dominated a less educated rank and file concerned primarily with personal and physical healing. Weightman criticizes the application of brainwashing constructs and is also critical of the journalistic account of Naipaul (1981), whose provocative interpretation of the evolution of Jones' movement highlights the fragmentation of American culture and the flourishing in the 1970s of various apocalyptic and mystical countercultures which interacted explosively in the countercultural melting pot of California. Finally, the popular, media and intellectual response to Jonestown has received significant scholarly attention (Jorgensen, 1980; Lindt, 1981; Shupe and Bromley, 1980:207-247).[2] The media review by Lindt (1981-2) is particularly valuable.

With the exception of the unpublished conference paper by Chidester (1983), an interesting quality of first wave social science work on Jonestown is its absence of a comparative-historical dimension. Possible historical counterparts of Jonestown such as the Jewish suicides at Masada or the mass immolations among Russian Old Believers were occasionally mentioned in media stories on Jonestown, but notwithstanding a few comments on Masada (Hauerwas, 1982; Mills, 1982), scholars generally do not appear to have followed these leads up with comparative investigations prior to the unpublished general theory of religious suicide presented at a conference by Chidester (1983) and the later exploratory comparative analysis of the Peoples Temple and the Old Believers by the present writer (1986). Yet the rather obvious comparison with the Old Believers was noted quite early not only by the occasional journalist but also by Soviet poet Andrei Voznesensky, in his poem "Guyana," which appeared in the *New York Times* on December 3, 1978 (translated by W. J. Smith). The third verse reads:

> Not hippies, not a group-sex cult,
> I see rise from the jungle dirt
> The flame of Russia's Old Believers
> destroying themselves in a wooden church.

Both Hall (1987) and Chidester (1988) incorporate a much deeper acknowledgement of Jonestown's place in history. Indeed, the tradition of mass religious suicide in Christian culture is so pervasive as to merit a separate discussion altogether; the perspectives of both Chidester and Hall are included in "The Historical Antecedents of Jonestown," elsewhere in this volume.

Exorcism: Distancing America From Jonestown

At the outset of this paper we quoted Chidester (1988:165) to the effect that the Peoples Temple and Jonestown might be viewed as an instance of a communal religiopolitical utopianism which is endemic to American history and has been a vital force in the colonization, settlement and expansion of the United States (see also FitzGerald, 1986). Nevertheless, the immediate reaction to the Jonestown tragedy amounted to a kind of exorcism, an identification of Jonestown as fundamentally other, an aberration basically foreign to American traditions. Jonestown was widely seen to reflect some combination of jungle fever in the Heart Of Darkness with godless Marxism and the arcane psychopathology of "destructive cultism."

Popular, media, and intellectual reactions to Jonestown represent vital concerns to both Hall and Chidester in their respective monographs. Hall notes that the tragedy in Guyana was widely interpreted as being intrinsic to the nature of a demonic cult and thus fundamentally alien to the American way of life. The terrible holocaust could not from this standpoint "be understood as a more complex product of the struggles between the Peoples Temple and its opponents" (Hall, 1987:308). Using Durkheimian concepts, Hall posits the compulsive construction of a mythic antimony of the "positive cult" or idealized conception of American society and the "negative cult or cancerous evil of the Peoples Temple — a group that cut itself off by migration, murder, and mass suicide" (Hall, 1987:308). In the aftermath of a disaster "ideological procedures of interpretation" arise which reflect the self-interests of various involved parties, and also "realize a basic capacity of religion...the reaffirmation of the sanctity of a social order (1987:308).

A rather more elaborate analysis of the phenomenology of the cultural response to Jonestown is presented by Chidester, who explores three modes of cognitive distancing whereby the absolute otherness of Jonestown to ourselves and our culture and society is insistently stressed.

(1) By means of psychological distancing, the Peoples Temple participants are dehumanized through the applications of psycho-medical and popular conceptions of mental illness, brainwashing, "cult madness," etc. Integral to psychological distancing is the "argument that conversion to and participation in an alternative religious movement can only be accounted for in terms of brainwashing, mind control, or coercive mental persuasion" (Chidester, 1988:29). Perceived now as subhuman, diseased, and totally helpless and manipulated, the actions of these putatively unfree agents may now appear less serious a threat to the society whose behavioral expectations their actions had so vividly overthrown. Cognitive distancing thus "served to reinforce the boundaries of normality that would be threatened by acknowledging the event of Jonestown as the result of conscious decisions made by fully human beings" (Chidester, 1988:31). The horrendous events of November 18, 1978 dramatically contravened normal expectations but the resulting dissonance "was muted through such strategies of psychological distancing that sought to remove the event of Jonestown from the region of daily human behavior" (Chidester, 1988:31). The otherness of Jonestown was mediated by strategies through which Jones et al. were depicted as "less than human and, therefore, less threatening to the large human community" (1988:31).

(2) A second mode of cognitive distancing — political distancing — was employed by State Department bureaucrats, Guyanese authorities, American socialists, and liberal San Francisco politicians (who had been allied with Jim Jones) to disclaim any responsibility for the events leading to the tragedy, for the prior growth of the Temple, or for any possible similarity of Jones' movement to their beliefs and activities. Lessons were drawn not only about the menace of cults, but also regarding the dangers of socialism — Jonestown embodied "socialism at work" (Novak, 1979) — and Marxist totalitarian slavery; while on the left the differences between Jones' dispensation and legitimate, authentic socialism were emphasized (Moberg, 1978). "Little concern was raised in the [U.S.] political arena about what the life and death of the Peoples Temple might *reveal* about America" (1988:22). Such considerations

were indeed voiced by Soviet and Guyanese commentators, the former associating the Jonestown horror with *capitalism*, and the latter denying that it was *their* problem, i.e., it reflected alienation and depravity in the United States, although some U.S. observers seemed to feel that the dark jungle of Guyana was an essential input. The present writer is reminded in this connection of one sociologist's view that new religions tend to become "spiritual inkblots; reports of movements may tell us more about the observer than about the observed"(Stone, 1978:142).

(3) Finally, religious distancing allowed the Disciples of Christ denomination — which had originally ordained Jones and supported his ministry — other Christian churches, evangelists, black churches, and other stigmatized cults such as the Unification Church to disavow any fundamental connection or convergence with the demonic reality of the Peoples Temple. Various Christian studies of the Peoples Temple (Olsen, 1979; Rose, 1979) appeared shortly after the shocking event and endeavored "to develop the imagery of 'Satanic influence,' 'the manipulations of Satan,' and 'false messiahs' in cosmic conflict with the 'true Messiah' in order to account for Jonestown as a manifestation of absolute evil in history" (1988:41). Though cultic or pseudo-religious, Jones' activities and beliefs bore "no relationship to the views and teachings of any legitimate form of Christianity," insisted Billy Graham (Chidester, 1988:40). For Graham, Jones was Satan's slave; for several black leaders and intellectuals he continued the tradition of white slave master dominating blacks. Thus "Jonestown was not a black problem but a problem of the subjection of blacks to white leadership, white authority, and white domination" (1988:44). A conference of black religious elders met to consider the tragedy but clearly rejected critical claims to the effect that a failure of black churches to minister to the problems of their flocks led the latter to seek refuge in the Temple, which did address some needs which the black churches ignored (Chidester, 1988:44). Nevertheless a similar point has recently been made with regard to the Peace Mission of Father Divine (Weisbrot, 1983), which had once served as an inspiration and model for Jim Jones (Chidester, 1988:4-7; Hall, 1987:50-52, 70-72; Weisbrot, 1983:217-219).

Mind-controlling cults were frequently held responsible for Jonestown, but for the most stigmatized of all the new religions, the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the Peoples Temple "served...as a model of the demonic forces of world domination that it perceived in international communism" (1988:45). For the much

criticized Elizabeth Clare Prophet of the Church Universal and Trium-
phant, the Jonestown tragedy and the furor it evoked was really a
demonic plot to discredit New Age religions.

> From Prophet's perspective as well, Jonestown symbol-
> ized a dangerous, poisonous, demonic influence from
> which new religious movements must distance them-
> selves in order to maintain the integrity of their spiritual
> authority... We learn from the various strategies of
> cognitive distancing what the Peoples Temple *was not*.
> From the strategies of psychological distancing we
> learn that it was not normal, not sane, not human; from
> the strategies of political distancing we learn it was not
> American, not socialist... from the strategies of reli-
> gious distancing we learn it was not Christian, not
> Black Christian, and not even religion. Each act of
> distancing was premised on the proposition that the
> Peoples Temple was 'not like us.'... The sudden, cata-
> strophic end of the Peoples Temple seemed to transform
> it into a transparent image of negation, an empty space
> to be filled with any number of different projected
> images of *otherness*, which served to reinforce a
> multitude of different psychological, political, and reli-
> gious commitments (1988:45-46).

Distancing and hidden agendas, suggests Chidester, may be
inherent in any attempt at causal explanation of controversial and
disturbing social phenomena. "The otherness of Jonestown could not be
effectively distanced without first incorporating it into a psychological,
political or religious explanatory system. In the end, such explanatory
systems have inevitably revealed more about the psychological, political,
and religious interests from which they were generated than about the
nature of the Peoples Temple" (1988:46). Meaningfully confronting the
formidable otherness of Jonestown requires that explanation give way to
"an *interpretation* that would clarify the conditions of possibility
within which the Peoples Temple emerged as a meaningful human
enterprise" (46).

Salvation and Suicide

Lindt (1981-82:179) has also criticized early attempts at sociological and psychological explanations of Jonestown; "what slips between these categorical approaches is an investigation of the movement's religious character." Chidester comments:

> The reason for this lacuna in the literature on the Peoples Temple may lie in the preoccupation with cognitive distancing which has informed most of the explanations of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and the event of Jonestown. The sheer otherness of the Peoples Temple, as it was appropriated in the popular imagination, has deflected serious consideration of the movement as a religion. The Peoples Temple could be explained as madness or criminal fraud, as a subversive political movement, or perhaps as a deceptive pseudoreligious cult, but the religious character of the Peoples Temple has not been allowed to register within the prevailing, strategic displacement of the movement into the realm of irrecoverable otherness (Chidester, 1988:47).

Chidester proposes a "religiohistorical interpretation" which "may be able to contribute to a recovery of the humanity of its members by attempting to reconstruct something of the design of the worldview that infused it as a church, as a religious movement, and as a utopian community in the jungles of Guyana." Chidester intends "to identify systems for the classification of persons, patterns of spatial and temporal orientation, and strategies of symbolic appropriation, engagement, and inversion by which that religious worldview assumed its unique shape in the history of the Peoples Temple" (1988:50). This analysis will constitute a reflection "on the ambiguous contribution of religion, simultaneously humanizing and dehumanizing, in the construction of human identity" (1988:50).

Religious sects frequently "negotiate salvation" through *symbolic inversion* of social structure and religio-cultural hegemony, e.g., "the last shall be first." According to Chidester, "A coherent theology does in fact emerge from the [California] sermons of Jim Jones" (1988:52), which remained relatively constant despite transformations

experienced by the movement in relocating to Guyana. Chidester ana-
lyzes this worldview in terms of *superhuman, subhuman* and
human classifications. Essential to symbolic inversion in Jones' sect is
the demystification of the superhuman, transcendent "Sky God" of
Judeo-Christian tradition, who is held not to really exist but also to be
guilty of vast crimes against humanity including the legitimization of
subhuman statuses for blacks, poor, women, etc. Challenging the Sky
God or "buzzard God" is the authentic God-Man, Jim Jones, who
embodies Divine Socialism and the human potential for deification.
Jones' theology, Chidester notes, really involves a variation of the *gnos-
tic redeemer myth* positing a fundamental dualism between the evil
creator God and the gnostic savior who emanates from a higher realm
of light and who "bypassed the creator God to save those who had the
saving knowledge from the prison of creation itself" (1988:56). "Human
beings did not need the illusion of an unseen, cruel, egotistical, oppres-
sive Sky God. They required a God in a body, a living savior. They needed
Jim Jones" (1988:55).

Much of Jones' rhetoric dealt with the subhuman classifica-
tions of blacks. "Because blacks were subclassified in America, prepa-
rations must in fact be underway for their elimination... Jones evoked
the spectre of concentration camps..." (1988:66; see also Naipaul, 288-
290). Christianity and conventional churches were said to uphold the de-
humanizing subclassification of blacks. Christianity also degraded
women, e.g., Tertullian's view of women as "the Devil's Gateway" for
sin. The Bible was also responsible for degrading the poor. Jones'
"Apostolic Socialism" was thus intended as *a religion for the sub-
classed.* It aimed at rejecting and inverting "the systematic classifica-
tion of persons that supported white social, political, and economic
power in America" (1988:69).

In Jones' view human nature was basically good. "The recovery
of an inherently good human nature from the evil societal network of
capitalism...constituted the explicit program of humanization in the
worldview of the Peoples Temple" (1988:72). Disease thus became a
metaphor for capitalism, "while healing served as a metaphor for the
humanizing influence of socialism" (1988:77). The superhuman gnostic
savior promised "an empowerment that would dissolve the dehumaniz-
ing bonds of subclassification in American society in order that a fully
human society of fully human persons might emerge in a new heaven
on earth" (1988:78).

Besides classification of persons, Chidester reconceptualizes and interprets much of the normative life of the Jonestown community in terms of Eliadian categories of orientations toward time and space (Eliade, 1961, 1979). Utopian communities tend to create "meaningful social space" by "reordering the extensions of the body through property and sex in ways that counteract their prevailing order within a larger society" (Chidester, 1988:97). Jones radically *deprivatized* such bodily extensions through prohibitions against involvement with individual possessions and exclusive sexual liaisons. Discussing the "humanistic geography" (Relph, 1976) of Jonestown, the author introduces a provocative distinction between current *recentering* religiopolitical movements such as right-wing fundamentalist groups, which "appropriate and resacralize the central symbols of American civil religion" (Chidester, 1988:87) and recent *decentering* movements which orient themselves to a "center out there" (e.g., a socialist utopia, the New Age, the inner self, Native American traditions, Islam). Such orientation affords a basis for relativizing and devaluing modern American civil space.

In the chapter, "Orientation in Time," Chidester discusses the apocalyptic visions of Jim Jones as they relate to cosmic, historical and body time. Particular emphasis is placed on Jones' expectation of a nuclear holocaust. "Within the worldview of the Peoples Temple, the nuclear apocalypse operated as all other apocalyptic eschatologies to displace symbolically the present social order in an imaginative vision of destruction, redemption, and rebirth at the culmination of cosmic time" (1988:110). Chidester does not, however, seem to give much emphasis to Jones' vision of an imminent genocidal race war, which Naipaul (1981) stresses.

Jim Jones was intensely concerned with his place in history and the revolutionary history-making role of the Temple. Through "revolutionary death" a worthwhile human death could be negotiated in the face of the dehumanizing options of passive death in a nuclear holocaust or through racial genocide. As Chidester and Hall (1981, 1987) have both noted, dramatic mass suicide was intended to achieve for Jones' followers a form of "revolutionary immortality" (Lifton, 1968) or "experiential transcendence of the ordinary rhythms of life" through voluntarily "sacrificing the body to the process, cause, or movement of an ongoing revolution" (Chidester, 1988:106). The posited sacred destiny of the Peoples Temple, dramatized by a stark ritual of collective suicide, evoked

a promise of salvation for humanity from history's endless stream of oppression and bondage, from imminent fascist dictatorship, and from meaningless life and death in an oppressive world.

Chidester's volume is tightly focused on a phenomenological model and interpretive espistemology. It spares the reader many significant details (e.g., on the Temple's economic operations) adumbrated in John Hall's substantially larger and more diversified work. Nevertheless, Chidester's monograph is an impressive tour de force. Though never tedious, it occasionally reads rather like an academic exercise in applying the categories of an abstruse and abstract structuralism. In mapping the Temple's worldview, Chidester perhaps reifies it such that it appears somewhat as a static and universally shared parameter of the Temple's collective life. Not enough light is shed on how the worldview evolved and shifted through the history of the movement, or how what was largely Jones' worldview may have been differentially internalized and interpreted by denizens of what was actually a partly stratified community. Although Chidester's treatment is clearly meant to be "interpretive" rather than explanatory, the reader is naturally going to be rather inquisitive as to why mass suicide unfolded. The answer will seem to be that the worldview caused it; "Collective suicide fused the worldview into a single act" (1988:155). Although the penultimate chapter does provide discussion of events preceding the final slaughter, the author's general treatment does not seem to this writer to provide a sufficient sense of the Jonestown massacre as a contingent catastrophe, a situated event culminating an escalating bitter conflict with fervent and determined antagonists.

Gone From the Promised Land

Longer and more detailed than *Salvations and Suicide*, John Hall's monograph, *Gone From the Promised Land*, covers the history of the Peoples Temple in substantial detail. Part One (five chapters) deals with the origins and early history of Jim Jones' ministry. Part Two (three chapters) deals with the ideology and organization of the Peoples Temple: its development as a diversified corporate conglomerate; its vision of a "collectivist reformation" (and associated socialization and internal control practices); and its involvement in politics and use of public relations. Chapter six, "The Corporate Conglomerate," is particularly fascinating. In California in the 1970s the Peoples Temple developed an extensive social service/welfare empire which began as an

organization of care-homes for "socially dependent" persons: elderly, disabled, retarded, etc. In effect Jones exploited the deinstitutionalization policies of some California hospitals. "The Temple's approach to social service delivery nevertheless constituted a threat to the established system, particularly at the county level... Because the Temple cultivated an independent source of clients, to a certain degree it rerouted authority to provide social services outside the established interorganizational social network, thereby challenging existing network organizations" (Hall, 1987:82).

The Temple built up an income base from tax avoidance and real estate equity, plus vertical integration of business services to care-home operators, austere tithing, mail order sales, radio programming and other devices. Participants signed over income (e.g., social security checks) as well as real estate, insurance policies and other valued items to the Temple. Large amounts of cash were kept on hand to provide "ready money that could be allocated without anyone tracing its flow... Following the widespread practices of corporations that seek to get out from under IRS regulation by shifting money out of the United States, the Temple placed much of its money in dummy 'offshore' accounts in countries with favorable banking laws" (1987:89). Yet Temple practices could benefit some socially dependent "clients" whom the Temple represented before social service officials; "it could liberate them from the degrading alienation in being treated as 'things' by anonymous bureaucrats" (1987:104). In its diversified financial manipulations and profitable operations the Temple "mirrored the wider U.S. culture"; yet in another sense the movement constituted "an alien force outside the matrix of culturally understandable motives, be they illegal or legal" (1987:105).

> Jones amassed followers and wealth by drawing upon well-worn cultural recipes, but his ends were mysterious: they did not fit within the conventional matrix of religion and business. He did not want to save souls in the hereafter, and for all the wealth he accumulated, he was not interested in personal material gain in this world. The Temple used the institutions of welfare capitalism to underwrite a charismatic struggle against the capitalistic order (Hall, 1987:105).

At the outset of his chapter on "The Corporate Conglomerate,"

Hall (1987:76-78) notes that the Peoples Temple had much in common with utopian communal groups in 17th century America, which "served as 'laboratories' of the new society" (1987:78). The Temple borrowed techniques from both fundamentalist churches and "modern organizational practices." "But the Temple's collectivist form and its unusual sense of mission also propelled it toward a new, synthetic bureaucratic form, one that mirrored the logic of the state and large corporations, but with a different orientation. Peoples Temple became a corporation of people" (1987:78).

One could wish that the author had perhaps gone a step further and considered whether, from an organizational standpoint, there is a generic quality to what he perceives as the unique and ambiguous not-exactly-a-church-yet-not-simply-a-business nature of the Temple, which interrelated spiritual, political and profit-seeking elements. Might this ambiguity not represent a salient generic feature of presently proliferating (and often charismatically led) religiotherapy or "people processing" movements and "Identity Transformation Organizations" (Greil and Rudy, 1984) such as Scientology (Bainbridge and Stark, 1981; Wallis, 1977) and Synanon (Ofshe, 1976, 1980), which also combine religious, political and capitalist operations (Moore, 1980). Yet despite some precedents, to be discussed in a seaprate essay in this volume, mass suicide is a fairly unique or at least rare outcome, even among "similar" movements or organizations. In other words, beyond the analysis of "general social processes and wider cultural currents at work," there is "left over," something which "cannot be explained by such comparisons...the unique residue of Peoples Temple that requires situational historical explanation" (Hall, 1987:XVIII). The analysis of the Peoples Temple as a movement and the explanation of Jonestown as an event are not one and the same. It is the emphasis on situational explanation, embedded in an overall narrative framework and with specific chapters focusing on particular sociological dynamics, which constitutes the strength of Hall's approach.

In Part Three (four chapters), the author zeroes in on the final years of the movement: the settlement in California, the move to Guyana, the intensifying struggle with the Concerned Relatives, and the opposing and mutually reinforcing typifications of Jonestown as the "Concentration Camp" and the hostile Concerned Relatives and apostates as the "conspiracy." The carnage in Guyana, Hall maintains, "has to be understood as a product of the conflict that emerged between the Peoples Temple and the people who came to call themselves the 'Con-

cerned Relatives.' That struggle quickly overshadowed daily life in Jonestown, and ironically, it intensified the very conditions — maintenance of a facade, infringement of individual liberties, and discipline — that the Temple's opponents declaimed" (1987:210). "At Jonestown the initially metaphoric revolutionary suicide — commitment to a transcendent cause — became transformed into actual mass suicide through struggle with the opposition, a dynamic that brought into play the crisis of a lost cause described by Thucydides. Without a decisive showdown with forsworn opponents, like the face-to-face confrontation involved in the visit to Jonestown by Leo Ryan and those who traveled with him, it is much less likely that the deaths would have occurred" (1987:295).

In the final chapter, "After Jonestown," the author restates an analysis initially developed in his pioneering 1981 article which highlighted the political element:

> The key to understanding Jonestown thus lies in the dynamics of conflict between a religious community and an external political order. It is worthwhile to consider in some detail the sociology of martyrdom under such circumstances. In the general case, a religious community that stands in opposition to an external political order forces a choice between the sacred and evil. The choice brings religious conviction to a question of honor, and it is the seedbed of martyrdom (1987:296).

The Peoples Temple was caught between a self-definition as an other-worldly sanctuary "on the other side of the apocalypse" and that of a "warring sect" engaged in an inescapable conflict with an overpowering and putatively vicious and corrupt established order. The inescapability of the conflict and the omnipotence and relentlessness of the conspiracy said to be directed against the Temple was increasingly emphasized by Jones and his close associates. Although this was functional in terms of internal solidarity and control, it undercut the conceptual consolidation of an insulated sanctuary or "post-apocalyptic plateau," such as constructed by most other alienated other-worldly sects, which condemn the broader society as evil but which actually evolve a de facto accommodation (Hall, 1981). "Jones had based the Peoples Temple as a movement on an apocalyptic vision that vacillated between a preapocalyptic ethic of confrontation and postapocalyptic ethos of sanctu-

ary" (1987:298). "Mass suicide would unite the divergent public threads of meaningful existence at Jonestown — those of political revolution and religious salvation" (1987:300).

The final catastrophe did not reflect merely Jones' worldview, but arose from the interaction of the latter with the impact of a concerted campaign against Jones and his establishment, the effect of which was to intensify certain elements in the worldview and enhance the stringency of authoritarian controls at Jonestown (see also Chidester, 1988:138-144 in this respect). The gradual escalation of the Concerned Relatives' campaign to intervene against the Guyana settlement and restrict its autonomy was perceived by Jones as a powerful threat to the mission of the movement. The "conspiracy" was seen to embody the inevitable retaliation of a racist and fascist society against a group which represented an alternative model of social cooperation that could not be allowed to survive. The dramatic visitation of Congressman Ryan seemed to be the initial touch of an inexorable crushing embrace bound to destroy the Temple. The spectacle of hundreds of dedicated followers voluntarily relinquishing their lives was to be a symbolic vindication which would repudiate the Concerned Relatives depiction of the Temple as a prison — a "powerful statement of solidarity" which would keep the flame of social justice burning.

Finally, a notable quality of Hall's monograph is the author's concern in the final chapter, and throughout the monograph, with seeing the Peoples Temple against the backdrop of conflicts in American culture and the responses of religious traditions. One of the remarkable things about the Peoples Temple is that, as it evolved, it managed to make contact with so many and diverse currents of apocalyptic religious imagery of national, social, cultural and personal redemption: American Blacks as the Chosen People and New Israel; the Church as a progressive social force; Kingdom Theology and the option for the poor; healing mystiques and ecstatic charismatic religion; premillennial and tribulationist visions; Father Divine's messianic aura; countercultural "consciousness" themes, etc., (see also Naipaul, 1981).

> The failure of Jonestown was more than the collapse of a community. Jim Jones and those who followed him established a movement that fused the central dilemmas of modern Christianity — philosophical antithesis of Christianity — a "godless" yet prophetic vision of com-

munism. These ideological themes found their concrete expression in a movement of *declasse* true believers — black, white, poor, working class and professional — who renounced their professional lives for a cause. In life they adopted the legacy of black suffering as the vehicle that carried forward their quest for redemption (1987:303).

Hall throws down the gauntlet for responsible historians, sociologists, theologians and political scientists who would study one of the cataclysmic events of our time. "In death," he writes, "[Peoples Temple] relinquished the burden of history to those of us who remain" (1987:303).

Notes

1. For review and discussion of the sociological research on "NRMs," see recent works by Barker (1986), Bromley and Hammond (1988), and Robbins (1988, a,b).

2. The reader on *Violence and Religious Commitment* edited by Levi (1982) includes slightly revised versions of the original articles by Richardson (1980) and Robbins (1988a,b).

References

Bainbridge, William and Rodney Stark. 1980. "Scientology: To Be Perfectly Clear." *Sociological Analysis*. (112): 128-136.

Barker, Eileen. 1986. "Religious Movements: Cult and Anti-cult since Jonestown." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12: 329-346.

Bromley, David G. and Phillip H. Hammond (eds.). 1987. *The Future of New Religious Movements*. Macon, GA: Mercer University.

Chidester, David. 1983. "Religious Suicide: Death and Classification at Jonestown." Presented to the American Academy of Religion, Dallas.

Chidester, David. 1988. *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown*. Bloomington: Indiana University.

Coser, Rose L. and Louis Coser. 1979. "Jonestown as Perverse Utopia." *Dissent* 26 (2): 158-162.

Eliade, Mircea. 1961. *Sacred and Profane*. Trans. W. R. Trask. New York.

Eliade, Mircea. 1969. *Images and Symbols*. Trans. P. Mairet. New York.

FitzGerald, Frances. 1986. *Cities on a Hill*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Greil, Arthur and David Rudy. 1984. "Social Cocoons: Encapsulation and Identity Transformation Organizations." *Sociological Inquiry* 54 (3): 260-278.

Grottanelli, Christiano. 1985. "Archaic Forms of Rebellion and Their Religious Background." Pp. 26-29 in B. Lincoln (ed.) *Religion, Rebellion, Revolution*. New York: St. Martins.

Hall, John. 1981 "The Apocalypse at Jonestown." Pp. 171-190 in T. Robbins and D. Anthony (eds.) *In Gods We Trust*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Hall, John. 1987. *Gone From the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Hauerwas, Stanley. 1982. "Self-Sacrifice as Demonic: A Theological Response." Pp. 152-162 in K. Levi (ed.) *Violence and Religious Commitment*. University Park: Penn State.

Johnson, Doyle. 1979. "Dilemmas of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of the Peoples Temple." *Sociological Analysis* 40 (4): 315-323.

Jorgensen, Danny. 1980. "The Social Construction and Interpretation of Deviance - Jonestown and the Mass Media." *Deviant Behavior* 1:309-332.

Kroth, Jerry. 1984. "Recapitulating Jonestown." *Journal of Psychohistory* 11:383-393.

Lasaga, Jose. 1980. "Death in Jonestown: Techniques of Political Control by a Paranoid Leader." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 10:210-213.

Levi, Kenneth (ed.). 1982. *Violence and Religious Commitment: Implications of Jim Jones' Peoples Temple Movement*. University Park: Penn State.

Lifton, Robert. 1968. *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution*. New York: Norton.

Lifton, Robert. 1979. "The Appeal of the Death Trip." *New York Times Magazine* (Jan 7).

Lindt, Gillian. 1981-82. "Journeys to Jonestown: Accounts and Interpretations of the Rise and Demise of the Peoples Temple." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 37: 159-74.

Meiers, Michael. 1988. *A CIA Experiment in Social Engineering: The Jonestown Conspiracy.* New York: Edwin Mellen.

Melton, J.G. 1985. "Violence and the Cults." *Nebraska Humanist* 8 (2):51-60.

Mills, Jeannie. 1982. "Jonestown Masada." Pp. 165-173 in K. Levi (ed.) *Violence and Religious Commitment.* University Park: Penn State.

Moberg, David. 1978. Series of reports in *In These Times* (Dec 6-26).

Moore, Joey. 1980. "Piercing the Religious Veil of the So-Called Cults." *Pepperdine Law Review* 7:655-710.

Moore, Rebecca (ed.). 1987. *The Jonestown Letters: Correspondence of the Moore Family, 1970-1985.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Moore, Rebecca. 1988. *In Defense of Peoples Temple.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Naipaul, Shiva. 1981. *Journey to Nowhere: A New World Tragedy.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Novak, Michael. 1979. "Jonestown: Socialism at Work." *American Enterprise Institute,* Reprint No. 94.

Ofshe, Richard. 1976. "Synanon: The People's Business." Pp. 116-138 in C. Glock and R. Bellah (eds.) *The New Religious Consciousness.* Berkeley: University of California.

Ofshe, Richard. 1980. "The Social Development of the Synanon Cult." *Sociological Analysis* 41 (2): 109-127.

Olsen, Paul. 1979. *The Bible Said It Would Happen.* Minneapolis.

Relph, E. C. 1976. *Place and Placeness.* London.

Richardson, James. 1980. "Peoples Temple and Jonestown: A Corrective Comparison and Critique ." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 19 (3):239-255.

Robbins, Thomas. 1986. "Religious Mass Suicide Before Jonestown: The Russian Old Believers." *Sociological Analysis* 41 (1):1-20.

Robbins, Thomas. 1988a. "The Transformative Impact of the Study of New Religious Movements on the New Religious Movements." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27 (1): 12-31.

Robbins, Thomas. 1988b. *Cults, Converts and Charisma: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*. London: Sage.

Rose, Steve. 1979. *Jesus and Jim Jones: Behind Jonestown*. New York: Pilgrim.

Shupe, Anson and David Bromley. 1980. *The New Vigilantes: Deprogrammers, Anti-Cultists and the New Religions*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Smith, Jonathan. 1982. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stone, Donald. 1987. "On Knowing What We Know about New Religions." Pp. 141-154 in J. Needleman and G. Bavier (eds.) *Understanding New Religions*. New York: Seabury.

Ulman, R. B. and D. W. Abse. 1983. "The Group Psychology of Mass Madness: Jonestown." *Political Psychology* 4: 637-661.

Wallis, Roy. 1977. *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology*. New York: Columbia University.

Wallis, Roy. 1984. *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wallis, Roy and Steven Bruce. 1986. *Sociological Theory, Religion and Collective Action*. Belfast: Queens University.

Weightman, Judith. 1983. *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Weisbrot, Robert. 1983. *Father Divine and the Struggle for Racial Equality*. Urbana: University of Illinois.

Wooden, Kenneth. 1981. *The Children of Jonestown*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Yanoff, Morris. 1984. "Some Lessons of Jonestown." *Chicago Tribune* Op. Ed. (Nov. 18).

The Effect of Jonestown
on Suicide Perception and Behavior

Steven Stack

The literature on Jonestown has neglected the possible impact of the Jonestown suicides on societal attitudes and behavior. The present study uses two datasets to assess the extent of any such impacts. An analysis of daily suicide counts indicates that there was a dip in suicide surrounding the twelve days of intense media coverage. There were approximately 58 fewer suicides than expected during the Jonestown coverage. The decline, however, was disproportionately found among females. The change among males, nonwhites and the young were not significant. The results are interpreted from the standpoint of social learning theory. The suicides were often interpreted in the press as murders taking place in the context of a religious cult. Much was made of the instances of infanticide. These negative meanings about the event may have lowered suicide propensities. While there was a short-term decline in suicide behavior, measures of long-term attitude change found little impact. Only one of four attitudes on suicide changed significantly. The analysis concludes that Jonestown had a short term impact on American suicide.

Introduction

The literature on Jonestown has pursued a number of themes, including personal accounts (e.g. Moore, 1985), geographic analysis of why the settlement was located in a rainforest (Crist, 1981), demographic concerns about the effects of not counting the 911 deaths in our mortality data (Bynum and Thompson, 1979), a comparison to the mass suicide of Russian Old Believers (Robbins, 1986), and the impact on the loss of control over seven patients' destructive impulses (Hoyt, 1981). While much has been written about the Jonestown suicides (Akers, 1985: 306-307), little is known about their impact, if any, on American suicide attitudes and suicide rates.

Not only have specialists on Jonestown neglected such an impact analysis, but specialists on suicide have also neglected this concern. Essentially all major studies of media impacts on suicide have omitted the Jonestown case from their analyses (e.g. Stack, 1987; Phillips and Bollen, 1985; Baran and Reiss, 1985). These studies have routinely left out stories concerning topical accounts of suicide and group suicides. The assumption has been that these stories will not promote adequate identification between the members of the audience and the suicide victims.

The present study fills this void in the literature on Jonestown and also in the literature on imitative suicide. After reviewing the past work, it formulates and tests hypotheses both on suicidal behavior and attitudes. Nationwide datasets are employed in both instances.

Previous Work

After a search through the last 15 years of both Psychological Abstracts and Sociological Abstracts, under the subject category "suicide," the present writer could find only one study that explored the effect of Jonestown on suicide. This was an early investigation employing a rather elementary analysis and methodology (Stack, 1983). This brief research note has a number of flaws which will be discussed and corrected herein.

The past note (Stack, 1983) analyzed the monthly suicide rate in assessing the impact of Jonestown on suicide. The past work measured the Jonestown event in terms of a two month (November-December 1978) period. The findings of no impact need to be taken with great caution,

since the impact of publicized suicide stories is thought to last only up to ten days (e.g., Phillips and Bollen, 1985). Stack may have failed to find an effect since he extended the experimental period backwards to November 1st and forward through December 31st. That is, a 50-day period of probable nil effects was averaged with a 10-day incubation period.

Second, the previous note did not control for other publicized suicide stories during the 1977-1979 period. This makes it more difficult to find significant effects, given that other stories had an impact. Third, Stack (1983) used preliminary data on suicide based on a 10% sample of death certificates. These are marked by more variability than the final data. Further analysis is needed where the final data are explored. Fourth, Stack (1983) did not explore Jonestown impacts on age, gender, or race specific populations. Given that Jones' followers were 80% black, we might anticipate a modeling effect, for example, involving blacks as opposed to whites (Akers, 1985). Further, to the extent that media effects are especially strong for young people, it seems reasonable to explore the Jonestown phenomenon with a run on the youth suicide rate (Phillips and Carstensen, 1986).

Finally, the past work did not deal at all with assessing the impact of Jonestown on American attitudes towards suicide. Possibly the association between suicide and the negative aspects of the Jonestown suicides (e.g., infanticide, murder, etc.) may have resulted in less approval of suicidal behavior, in general.

Theoretical Concerns

Most research on media impacts on suicide has been restricted to the study of the effect of stories about individuals who commit suicide. Generally speaking, stories on a wide variety of victims (e.g., popular movie stars, Senators, murderers, political villains awaiting trial, and so on) are lumped together into an aggregated index. This wide-sweeping index is generally found to be predictive of suicide (Stack, 1988; see Phillips 1986 for a review). The theoretical interpretation of these findings has been discussed in terms of Tarde's theory of suggestion (Stack, 1987b), and numerous perspectives drawn from social psychology and sociology, including reference work, behavior discussion, and anomie theory (see Phillips, 1979: 1168-1171 for a discussion).[1]

Stack (1987b) contends, however, that only certain categories of suicide stories trigger imitative suicides. Focusing on cases of celebrity suicides, Stack reports that only publicized stories involving entertain-

ment celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, and political celebrities such as Secretary of War James Forrestal were associated with increases in the suicide rate. In contrast, stories about villains, the wealthy, and artist celebrities were unrelated to suicide.

Given the findings that publicized suicides of villains, such as those of terrorists and mass murderers who commit suicide in order to avoid capture by the police, we might anticipate that the instance of Jonestown would not be related to suicide. Indeed, the reporting of the incident included news of the murders of a U.S. Congressman and persons leaving the settlement just before the mass suicide (Akers, 1985: 306).

Many other negative meanings to the event were included in the news coverage. The media channels quickly labelled the Jonestown groups as a "cult" (e.g., *Time*, 1978). It was often implied that the suicides were involuntary, given the presence of armed guards. There was extensive film coverage and reporting on the "rotting bodies," often shown in death camp fashion, in piles. Certainly any glamour to the act of suicide was minimized through such reporting. From the standpoint of social learning theory (Akers, 1985), the public learned to associate suicide with various negative measures that would discourage suicide.

Further, there were cases of infanticide, given that some parents fed their infants cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. The headlines in *The Los Angeles Times*, for example, read: "Started with Babies: Jones Ordered Cultists to Drink Cyanide Potion" (*Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 1978, page 1). Given the preoccupation of the press with infanticide, and that females probably identify more than males with the care of infants given traditional gender roles, female suicide might be especially likely to dip during the coverage of Jonestown. To assess these possibilities, the present study analyzes gender-specific suicide counts.

As Phillips (1979, 1986) points out, from the standpoint of modeling theory, the greater the similarity between the model and the audience, the greater the likelihood of imitation. Given that approximately 80% of Jones' followers were black, there is reason to believe that any impact would be felt more among blacks than whites. Hence, the present study includes a race-specific analysis.

Nevertheless, from a social-learning theory of suicide, suicidal behavior is apt to occur if such behavior is reinforced (Akers, 1985: 41-44). Television news coverage can be viewed as a reward of sorts by the suicidal. Possibly, in this sense, the fantasy that some people will "finally notice me" is transmitted to the suicidal through the reward of

television coverage of suicide. This notion is consistent with the view of Farberow and Shneidman (1965) that suicidal behavior is often a "cry for help." In this context, the Jonestown suicides may have stimulated a significant increase in suicide.

There is some reason to believe that young persons might be more at risk of imitating suicidal behavior (e.g., Phillips and Carstensen, 1986). The young are less socialized into society's institutions, often less mature than the middle-aged and elderly, and are often said to be more impulsive that the older groups in society. For these reasons the present study explores the impact of Jonestown on the suicide rate of the young, a group thought to be at high risk of suggestion and imitation.

Given that there are reasons to believe both in a positive and a negative relationship between Jonestown and suicide, a two-tailed statistical test will be used.

Methodology

Data were collected for a three-year period, January 1977 through December 1979, a period similar to that in the past work (Stack, 1983). The data on suicide were taken from computer tapes supplied through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. The dependent variable refers to the number of suicides per day. Separate suicide counts are constructed for groups of different theoretical interest: the total population, non-whites, females, males, and the young (15-34).

The day is the unit of analysis. It also has the advantage of being able to control for the effects of holidays which are lost when the month is used as the temporal unit. An advantage is that some writers contend that the effect of suicide stories is short-lived, probably lasting only ten days (Bollen and Phillips, 1982). If this is the case, the effect of suicide stories may be lost if one aggregates the data at the monthly level.

A potential problem with the official statistics on suicide being used herein is that they probably underestimate the number of suicides due to such factors as the concealment of the cause of death. While there is little doubt that there is some downward bias in the official data, the real issue is whether or not there is systematic bias with respect to the unit of analysis. There is much research evidence that any such bias is minimal (Pescosolido and Mendelsohn, 1986; Barraclough and White, 1978). While the most rigorous evidence that the measurement errors in

official data are not large enough to preclude analysis is based on cross-sectional data (Pescosolido and Mendelsohn, 1986), there is no evidence of a time-related systematic bias in the under-reporting of suicide (Marshall, 1978: 764).

The Jonestown suicides occurred on November 18th, 1978. The story broke on November 19th. For the twelve days extending through November 30th, it was the subject of three network (ABC, CBS, and NBC) television news stories for each of ten of the twelve days (Joint University Libraries, 1978). The coverage diminished to one network coverage on December 1st and to no coverage at all on December 2nd and December 3rd. The present study measures the period of an impact as being November 19th through November 30th. A second analysis was done with an additional ten days added to the variable to measure a lag effect. The results indicated that the impact did not last beyond the 12 days of intense media coverage. The Jonestown variable is measured as a set of ones for the 12 days. All other days are measured as zeroes, a standard procedure for using "dummy variables" in statistical analysis (Johnston, 1984).

One key methodological problem is that the Thanksgiving holiday occurred in the middle of the intense Jonestown coverage. The network television coverage began on Sunday, November 19th. Thanksgiving occurred on Thursday, November 23rd. To the extent that suicide rates are sensitive to the Thanksgiving holiday, changes in the suicide rate for the Jonestown period could be contaminated by a holiday effect.

The Thanksgiving holiday issue was dealt with in the following manner. First, a preliminary analysis was done to see if any of the suicide counts were affected by the Thanksgiving holiday. The period from 1972 through 1977 was analyzed so as to not bias the coefficients with any Jonestown effect from 1978. The results indicated that the total suicide rate and male suicide rates were affected by the Thanksgiving holiday. On the average, there were 14 fewer suicides on Thanksgiving than on other days of the year. There were 11 fewer male suicides on Thanksgiving than expected. The counts for females, the young, and nonwhites were, however, not significantly affected by the holiday. It is possible that the holiday effect might last longer than just Thanksgiving Day itself. To assess this issue, another five regression analyses were done with five lagged terms measuring the impact, if any, of the holiday up to five days after it occurred. In all instances, all five of these lag terms were insignificant. It is concluded, then, that the Thanksgiving effect holds for only the total and male suicide counts; further, it lasts for only

one day. The results of the total count and for males should be taken with caution, since we would expect fewer suicides during the Jonestown period, given the Thanksgiving holiday. If the decrease is more than 11-14, however, the residual cases are probably due to the Jonestown event.

Since the period under study included a number of publicized suicide stories besides the instance of Jonestown, a control is introduced for these stories. The present study measures a publicized suicide story as one that made at least two of the three major television networks. In particular, a publicized suicide story needs to have made the 6:00 pm. national news on two of the following networks: ABC, CBS or NBC. Not all suicide stories are counted, however. The present study follows the same conventions as Bollen and Phillips (1982) in selecting stories. For example, stories on the general topic of suicide and stories on suicide in the distant past are excluded from the analysis. The data source is the Vanderbilt Television News Archives (Joint University Libraries, 1968-1981).

Given that suicide rates vary according to season and month, the suicide data need to be deseasonalized. Seasonal effects on suicide are controlled out by introducing 11 dummy variables into the analysis for the months February through December. This is the same technique as employed in previous studies (e.g., Phillips and Bollen, 1985; Baron and Reiss, 1985).

In addition, to control for any holiday effects, controls are introduced for five national holidays. These are the same holidays as in the past work (Phillips and Bollen, 1985): Labor Day, Christmas, New Year's Day, Memorial Day, and July 4th. A dummy variable is introduced for each holiday (one = the holiday, 0 = other days).

As in the past research on suicide counts, two additional dummy variables are entered into the equations. These are annual dummy variables to help control out any trend in the data over time, one for 1977 and another for 1978.

Data on suicide attitudes are scarce, especially at the national level. The present study will use the General Social Survey items (Davis, 1985). The data were provided on a computer tape from the Inter-University Library Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. Data were sought as close to the beginning and the ending of the Jonestown coverage as possible. Unfortunately, given that the GSS survey is done only once a year, and that the suicide questions are not always asked, this meant settling for the spring 1978 and the spring 1982 survey results. These data are not suitable for

assessing any short-term changes in attitudes. They are able, however, to capture any substantial long-term attitude change resulting from Jonestown.

Four attitude items were available from the GSS surveys. They refer to the respondent's approval or disapproval to four hypothetical situations or rationalizations for suicide: incurable disease, bankruptcy, dishonor of family, and being tired of living. While these data have their limitations, they are the best available.

The Analysis

The analysis first estimated the equations with ordinary least squares regression. The results for the total and gender-specific counts are given in Table 1.

Two of these OLS equations were estimated with a lagged dependent variable in order to adjust the equation for a slight problem of autocorrelation, a situation that violates one of the assumptions of regression analysis (Johnson, 1984). The results of the preliminary equations were essentially the same as those reported here. The equation for the female count did not require any adjustments given nonsignificant (rho = -0.004) autocorrelation.

On the average there were 78 suicides per day during the 1978 - 1979 period.

Controlling for the other variables in the equation, Jonestown was associated with a significant drop in the total suicide count (t=-2.001, p. < .05). On the average, there were 5.95 fewer suicides per day during the media coverage of the event than we would expect. This dip amounts to roughly an eight percent reduction in the daily average of 78 suicides per day. Further, given that the coverage lasted 12 days, this amounts to a dip of 72 suicides. As pointed out earlier, however, we would expect a decrease of approximately 14 suicides due to Thanksgiving. Therefore, the net decline in suicide during the Jonestown coverage is approximately 58 suicides. In order to put this dip into perspective, we can compare it to the increases and decreases associated with some of the other factors in the equation. For example, for days during the month of May, the coefficient is 8.8, meaning we can expect 8.8 additional suicides per day in the month of May as compared to January, the month omitted from the equation and used as a benchmark. Similarly, we can expect 10.5 more suicides on "blue" Monday than on Sundays. The largest

Table 1.
The Effect of Television News Coverage of Jonestown on Total and Gender-Specific Suicide Counts, 1977 - 1979

	Estimated Coefficients		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Autoregressive models	OLS Total	OLS Male	OLS Female
Variable:			
Lag of Suicide Rate	0.10*	0.10*	——
Jonestown Coverage	-5.94*	-2.77	-3.58*
1977 dummy	3.45*	2.00*	1.62*
1978 dummy	0.40	-0.07	0.53
February	3.03*	1.19	2.03*
March	7.54*	4.87*	2.94*
April	7.49*	4.74*	3.07*
May	8.82*	5.24*	3.97*
June	6.10*	3.16*	3.28*
July	4.92*	3.05*	2.08*
August	5.04*	3.08*	2.16*
September	5.10*	2.51*	2.86*
October	4.57*	2.47*	2.31*
November	3.72*	1.33	2.67*
December	-0.44		
Monday	10.57*	8.06*	2.57*
Tuesday	4.64*	3.89*	1.07*
Wednesday	1.48	1.39	0.25
Thursday	1.26	1.23	0.10
Friday	-0.11	0.24	-0.29
Saturday	-1.36	0.80	-0.54

Table 1 (cont.)

New Year's Day	16.64*	9.77*	7.09*
Memorial Day	0.15	0.12	-0.02
July 4th	-0.57	0.60	-1.46
Labor Day	-6.58	-2.46	-4.01
Christmas	-6.80	-6.03	-1.19
Constant	59.61*	44.88*	16.37*
R-square	0.27	0.18	0.16
Durbin Watson d	2.00	1.99	2.01
Autocorrelation coefficient	0.00	0.001	-0.004

Notes: the regression coefficients for the remaining variables in the model (control for other television suicide stories with 10-day lag terms) are not shown for reasons of clarity and brevity.

* = statistically significant at the .05 level, p. < .05.

---

coefficient is for New Year's Day. We can expect 16.6 more suicides on this day, on the average, than for the rest of the year.

Turning to column 2 of Table 1, the results indicate that there were 2.76 fewer suicides per day for males during the Jonestown coverage than for the rest of the period, on the average. This does not, however, meet the requirements for statistical significance.

For females, the average number of suicides per day was 19.8 during the 1978 - 1979 period. Their (see column 3) dip in suicides during the Jonestown coverage amounts to 3.58 suicides per day. This amounts to roughly one-third fewer than the normal suicide count for females. This figure is significant. It compares to an increase in female suicides of 3.97 per day in the month of May, the peak for female suicide in terms of season. The increase in female suicide associated with Jonestown is greater than the average increase on "blue" Monday (2.57 suicides).

Table 2 provides the results of the analysis for nonwhites and young people (15 - 34). Controlling for the other variables in the equation, Jonestown was associated with an increase of 0.19 suicides per day for nonwhites. This number is not significantly different from zero (t=0.259, p=0.79)

Table 2.
The Effect of Television News Coverage of Jonestown on Nonwhite and Youth Suicide Counts, 1977 - 1979

Estimated Coefficients

	(1)	(2)
	OLS Non Whites	OLS Young People
Variable:		
Jonestown Coverage	0.19	-0.62
1977 dummy	-0.48*	0.75
1978 dummy	-0.60	-0.94*
February	0.09	2.75*
March	0.70*	0.82
April	0.92*	0.67
May	0.46	0.66
June	0.18	0.62
July	0.38	0.09
August	0.52	0.83
September	0.44	1.04
October	0.03	0.74
November	0.08	0.76
December	0.08	-0.06
Monday	0.32	1.75*
Tuesday	-0.11	0.83
Wednesday	0.25	-0.59
Thursday	-0.03	-0.70
Friday	0.16	-1.68*
Saturday	0.25	-0.43

Table 2 (cont.)

New Year's Day	3.42*	11.91*
Memorial Day	-0.31	-0.61
July 4th	-0.56	-1.37
Labor Day	2.01	-0.07
Christmas	-0.84	-2.08
Constant	5.73*	29.68*
R-square	0.04	0.10
Durbin Watson d	2.05	1.94
Autocorrelation coefficient	-0.026	0.029

Notes: the regression coefficient for the remaining variables in the model (control for other television suicide stories with 10-day lag terms) are not shown for reasons of clarity and brevity.

* = statistically significant at the .05 level, $p < .05$.

Turning to young people (column 2), controlling for the other variables, suicides dipped by only 0.62 per day for this age group. This amount is not statistically significant ($t=0.72$, $p=0.73$). Jonestown, then, did not affect the suicide counts for these two groups.

There remains the issue as to whether or not Jonestown affected American attitudes towards suicide. Table 3 provides data from the General Social Survey on these matters. In all four cases, there is a small increase in the percentage of the respondents who give a pro-suicide response. For example, in 1978, 39.1% of the sample thought that a person with an incurable disease had the right to end his or her life. This increased to 41.3% in 1982. A Chi Square test, however, indicates that this change is not significant and could, then, be due to chance fluctuations. In contrast, however, the chi square test for the question on the appropriateness of suicide as a response to bankruptcy indicates a significant increase in the pro-suicide response. In all, only one of four of the suicide attitudes changed significantly.

Table 3.
The Effect of Jonestown on Suicide Attitudes, Spring 1978 and Spring 1982

National Samples (n = 1462, n = 1710).

Do you think that a person has the right to end his or her life if this person has:

	1978	1982		1978	1982
A. An Incurable Disease			**C. Has Dishonored His or Her Family**		
YES	39.1%	41.3%			
			YES	6.3%	8.1%
NO	60.9%	58.7%			
			NO	93.7%	91.9%
Chi Square: 1.53		p = .216			
			Chi Square: 3.70		p = .054
B. Has Gone Bankrupt			**D. Is Tired of Living and Ready to Die**		
YES	5.6%	7.7%			
			YES	11.9%	13.0%
NO	94.4%	92.3%			
			NO	88.1%	86.9%
Chi Square: 5.58		p = .018			
			Chi Square: 0.93		p = .334

Source: General Social Surveys, 1978 and 1982.

Conclusion

The present study assessed the impact of Jonestown on American suicidal behavior and attitudes. The results of a statistical analysis found that the coverage of the event generally reduced suicide. There were 58 fewer suicides than we would have expected in the 12 days of coverage. This finding is consistent with social learning theory in that the population learned to associate suicide with negativistic stimuli such as "cults" and infanticide. The latter may account for why the coverage caused a death dip for females and not males.

Surprisingly, the coverage had no impact on the suicide count for nonwhites, the group similar in terms of race to the Jonestown victims. Further analysis, not reported here, of suicide counts for nonwhite females and young nonwhites failed to uncover any significant findings.

Finally, there is little evidence of a long term impact on American attitudes towards suicide. Only one of four attitudes towards suicide changed significantly. These findings, however, need to be taken with caution, since they are based on time periods far removed from the media coverage of the event. Possibly attitudes towards suicide did change in the period of the coverage of the event. No data, however, were collected at that time, so we will never know.

Notes

1. Wasserman (1984) argues that the imitation effect holds only for stories on celebrity suicides. However, Wasserman's list is marked by measurement errors. Many persons are misclassified, some should not be included, being only locally publicized suicides, and other relevant cases are omitted. Wasserman does not dispute these measurement errors (personal communication). Some recent analyses have found, however, that noncelebrity suicide stories, if given enough publicity, are associated with upswings in the suicide rate (Stack, 1987a).

References

Akers, Ronald. 1985. *Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.

Baron, James and Peter Reiss. 1985. "Same time, next year: Aggregate analysis of the mass media and violent behavior." *American Sociological Review* 50: 364-371.

Barraclough, B.M. and Susan White. 1978. "Monthly variation of suicidal, accidental, and undetermined poisoning deaths." *British Journal of Psychiatry* 132:279-282.

Bollen, Kenneth and David Phillips. 1982. "Imitative suicides: a national study of the effects of television news stories." *American Sociological Review* 47:802-809.

Bynum, Jack E. and William Thompson. 1979. "November 1, 1978 in Jonestown: statistical effects of a micro demographic event." *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 7: 45-47.

Crist, R. E. 1981. "Jungle geopolitics in Guyana." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 40: 107-114.

Davis, James A. 1985. *General Social Survey, 1972 - 1985: Cumulative Codebook*. Storrs, Connecticut: Roper Opinion Center.

Farberow, Norman and Edwin Shneidman (eds.). 1965. *Suicide: The Cry for Help*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Hoyt, Michael F. 1981. "Observations regarding patients' reactions to the Jonestown massacre and Moscone-Milk assassinations." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 9: 303-309.

Johnston, J. 1984. *Econometric Methods: Third Edition*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Joint University Libraries. 1968-1981. Vanderbilt Television News Archives. Nashville: Vanderbilt University.

Marshall, James. 1978. "Changes in aged white male suicide: 1948 - 1972." *Journal of Gerontology* 33: 763-768.

Moore, Rebecca. 1985. *The Jonestown Letters*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press.

Pescosolido, Bernice and Robert Mendelsohn. 1986. "Social causation or social construction of suicide? An investigation into the social organization of official rates." *American Sociological Review* 51: 80-101.

Phillips, David. 1979. "Suicide, motor vehicle fatalities and the mass media." *American Journal of Sociology* 84: 1150-1174.

Phillips, David. 1986. "The found experiment: A new technique for assessing the impact of mass media violence on real world aggressive behavior." *Public Communication and Behavior* 1: 259-307.

Phillips, David and Kenneth Bollen. 1985. "Same time, last year: Selective data dredging for negative findings." *American Sociological Review* 50: 364-371.

Phillips, David and L. Carstensen. 1986. "Clustering of teenage suicides after television stories about suicide." *New England Journal of Medicine* 315: 685-689.

Robbins, Thomas L. 1986. "Religious mass suicide before Jonestown: The Russian Old Believers." *Sociological Analysis* 47: 1-20.

Stack, Steven. 1983. "The effect of Jonestown on the suicide rate." *Journal of Social Psychology* 119: 145-146.

Stack, Steven. 1987a. "The sociological study of suicide: Methodological issues." *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior* 17 (Summer): 133-150.

Stack, Steven. "Celebrities and suicide: A Taxonomy and analysis, 1948 - 1983." *American Sociological Review* 52 (June): 401-413.

Stack, Steven. "Suicide in War and Peace, 1910 - 1920." *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior* 18 (4): Winter 1988.

Time. "Nightmare in Jonestown." December 4, 1978: 16-21.

Wasserman, Ira. 1984. "Imitation and suicide: A re-examination of the Werther Effect." *American Sociological Review* 49: 427-436.

The Peoples Temple, the Apocalypse at Jonestown, and the Anti-Cult Movement

Anson Shupe

David G. Bromley

Edward F. Breschel

The archetypal horror of the November 1978 Peoples Temple suicide/massacre at Jonestown, Guyana provided the modern American anti-cult movement (hereafter ACM) with the strongest, most dramatic evidence possible of its allegations that some new religious movements (hereafter NRMs) hold an awesome destructive potential. That catastrophic event, which came to be referred to simply as "Jonestown," confirmed the worst nightmares of the families with relatives and families in unconventional NRMs. The ACM also anticipated that the event would enhance their credibility and result in both greater public concern about "destructive cultism" and in formal sanctions against cultic groups. That expected public and governmental support has not been forthcoming, however. In fact, a decade later, Jonestown emerges in retrospect not as a watershed which turned the organizational fortunes of the ACM but as a unique historical event with much more limited strategic opportunities for the ACM than it seemed to possess at the time. This essay explores the role Jonestown played in ACM development and the reasons for the failure of Jonestown to provide the anticipated catalyst in the ACM's war against "destructive cultism."

The Anti-Cult Movement Prior to Jonestown

The ACM has seldom been analytically discussed from the standpoint of its history, objectives, composition and worldwide parallel organizations. Elsewhere we and a few others have outlined and updated its expansion as a struggling countermovement (see, e.g., Beckford, 1985; Shupe, Hardin and Bromley, 1983; Shupe and Bromley, 1980). The ACM began in 1971 in the United States as a largely familial reaction to the challenges of NRMs such as the Children of God, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (the Hare Krishnas), the Church of Scientology, and the Unification Church (the "Moonies"). Later the list of alleged cults grew to include various other Christian sects, groups of Eastern origins and, more recently, a variety of quasi-therapeutic groups. The ACM was a grassroots response to perceived threats to bedrock middle class American institutions and values (Bromley and Busching, 1988). These purportedly endangered institutional arrangements putatively included nuclear family solidarity and parental authority, democratic government, church-state separation, independent mass media, and mainline religious traditions. The values at risk included individualistic enterprise and capitalistic achievement, self-direction in careers and lifestyles; intellectual/cognitive integrity; and Judeo-Christian morality (Bromley and Shupe, 1981; Shupe and Bromley, 1979).

From its inception, the ACM directed its campaign against NRMs at two levels, organizational and interpersonal, though the two separate levels often reinforced and overlapped each other (Shupe, 1985; Bromley, 1988a). At the organizational level, the ACM engaged in a broad range of activities such as conducting "educational" programs about the dangers of cults in schools and churches, seeking media coverage of their grievances and counter-cult agenda, and lobbying both state legislatures and Congress to pass measures which would impose various types of legal restrictions and penalties on NRMs. In such initiatives, the ACM received sympathy and even tangible support from elements of the media, as well as from some political, religious, and educational elites.

At an interpersonal level, the ACM developed a more ad hoc, vigilante procedure termed "deprogramming." This serendipitously developed quasi-therapy allegedly reversed the effect of "cultic programming" on cult victims. Conceptually, it depended on some combination of a deprivation/coercion/manipulation/hypnosis explanation for NRM

affiliation and presumably "liberated" deprogrammees thought processes, thereby extricating them from the psychological control of NRMs. Procedurally, deprogramming entailed separating NRM members from their groups' supportive subcultures, voluntarily or forcibly, and then confronting them with whatever assortment of allegations of NRM improprieties, hostile testimonies from former members, emotional appeals from family members, recitations of brainwashing ideology or theological arguments was effective in persuading those individuals to renounce their group memberships. A motley, sometimes even disreputable, collection of individual moral entrepreneurs coalesced around the market of distraught families and helped generate a sometimes lucrative trade in recovering errant youths (Shupe and Bromley, 1980; Bromley, 1988b).

By 1976, components of the ACM had sprung up around the continental United States, made contact with one another, and created a consciousness-of-kind. In that year, ACM activists were even able to arrange a public hearing in Washington, D.C., chaired by Kansas Senator Robert Dole, at which aggrieved family members and sympathetic professionals testified against the pre-eminent NRM embodying the majority of characteristics in ACM complaints: Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (CEFM, 1976). Skeptics could contend that it was largely an exercise in commission politics by elected officials who placated anxious constituents over a conflict involving very sensitive church-state issues. However, ACM supporters took heart that at last their cause had received formal notice by federal government officials.

Despite its effectiveness in spreading the popular stereotypes of NRMs as ersatz religions and their leaders as unscrupulous charlatans, by the late 1970s the ACM was facing an organizational crisis. Initially, naive attempts to mobilize local and national law enforcement agencies to rescue legal-age offspring from religious groups, however non-mainstream, achieved mixed success. Local law enforcement agencies frequently did allow parents, in alliance with deprogrammers, to physically abduct and restrain lost sons and daughters, and the FBI chose to regard interstate transportation of deprogrammees in such circumstances as family disputes. Despite hundreds of successful deprogrammings during the late 1970s, the practice remained expensive, risky and unpredictable. Efforts to attack cults frontally through the existing enforcement powers of state and federal agencies or passage of new legislation confronted the ACM with the problem of providing operationally viable definitions of the concepts of "cults" and "brain-

washing," which it was never able to achieve. Mainline church leaders
and civil libertarians warned of a poorly-researched problem giving rise
to a cult hysteria that could pose a real and profound threat to the
American tradition of religious liberty. Public officials sensed a political
quagmire both in codifying the difference between safe or authentic
religions and dangerous or false ones, and in certifying practices asso-
ciated with legitimate religious conversion.

ACM problems during this period were further complicated by
organizational divisions within the movement. During these early
years, separate components of the ACM, some with proud and charis-
matic leaders the analogs of their cultic guru opponents, quarreled over
issues of resources and centralization of power. While early in its history
the movement underwent a succession of attempts to create a unified
national organization, the ACM was unable to consolidate beyond an
alignment of regional and local groups holding common goals but
uneven resources, skills, and geographically dispersed constituents.

The ACM persistently tried to link cults to issues which would
arouse broader community support, such as child and spouse abuse,
deplorable health conditions in NRM communes, NRM exploitation of
tax exemptions and labor laws, cultic violence and various possible
violations of law or regulatory agency provisions (ranging from decep-
tive public solicitation and illegal immigration practices to illicit con-
gressional lobbying). Despite these efforts, the countermovement's core
constituency remained angry associates of NRM members. The ACM
circle was clearly an inbred one, of interest only to a narrow portion of the
population. The broader public of the late 1970s was plainly more con-
cerned with international problems, soaring crime rates, and a souring
national economy.

The Jonestown Tragedy and the Public Reaction

Most Americans had never heard of Peoples Temple, with its
organizational roots in the mainstream Disciples of Christ denomina-
tion, until mid-November 1978, when U.S. Rep. Leo Ryan of California
visited the Rev. Jim Jones' rugged jungle encampment of Jonestown,
Guyana. With him traveled an entourage of news media personnel to
investigate complaints lodged against the former San Francisco-based
church by relatives of church members. At the time of Ryan's visit,
Peoples Temple had been locked in an extended battle with the Con-
cerned Relatives, a coalition of relatives of church members and apos-

tate members. As Hall (1981) has observed, Peoples Temple possessed conflicting self identities — on the one hand as an "otherworldly sect" and on the other as a "warring sect" locked in inevitable conflict with a repressive, evil social order. The impending conflict was perceived by Jones and some close associates as inevitable and inescapable, and it was in that context that the final chapter in Peoples Temple's history was written.

After spending two days at the Jonestown settlement, Ryan and his party left for two planes at the Port Kaituma airstrip seven miles away. There they were overtaken by a truckload of Jones' followers, who killed five people — including Ryan — and wounded 12 in a barrage of gunfire. At the same time, the now infamous, well-rehearsed ritual communion in Jonestown began. Peoples Temple members were assembled to participate in a final collective gesture of defiance by committing suicide. Members queued up as Dr. Lawrence Schacht, the settlement's physician, and two nurses administered a flavored drink laced with cyanide, first to infants and small children, then to adults and even to pets. When 200 troops sent from the U.S. Defense Department to Guyana searched the camp, they discovered more than 900 corpses. Only a handful of members had escaped or been overlooked. Overnight, Peoples Temple became labeled "the suicide cult." The ACM's worst case scenario had materialized.

Tragic as the events of November 18, 1978 were, they came as an unexpected boon to the flagging credibility of the ACM. Murdered Congressman Leo Ryan, who had been an outspoken critic of NRMs before he journeyed to Jonestown, provided the ACM with its first celebrity martyr. Moreover, the presence of more than 200 children, most of them pre-adolescents and even infants, lent a new depth of horror to outrages claimed by the ACM. The image of more than 900 misdirected, sacrificed souls lying dead and having supposedly gone sheep-like to the slaughter transformed Peoples Temple into the archetypal "destructive cult." Jones, in turn, became the archetypal megalomaniacal cult leader about whom ACM group spokespersons and newsletters had been issuing dire warnings for the better part of a decade.

The news of the Jonestown tragedy spread rapidly and broadly. As Barker (1986: 330) reported: "Early in December 1978, a Gallup Poll found that 98% of the U.S. public had heard or read about the Peoples Temple and the Guyana massacre — a level of awareness matched in the pollsters' experience only by the attack on Pearl Harbor and the

explosion of the atom bomb." Conway and Siegelman (1979: 59) noted the immediate effects Jonestown had in the responsiveness of the media to cult related issues:

> It took Guyana to put the issue in the public eye. Up to the moment of that holocaust, virtually all of Government and the media were reluctant to venture in to the difficult areas of religious freedom on the one hand and rumors of bizarre cult practices on the other, not to mention intense lobbying pressure from the various cults themselves. Five days before the Guyana story broke, pummeled by hundreds of letters, telegrams, phone calls, threatened lawsuits and repeated acts of physical intimidation, NBC News halted an investigation it was conducting into the phenomenon of 'destructive cultism.' The Justice Department itself had turned away nearly 500 complaints from parents of cult members on the grounds that the First Amendment forbade it from becoming involved in any matters pertaining to religion... Then came Guyana, and overnight it was a whole new ball game. Suddenly, no one could get enough of the cults, all of them, any of them. NBC News aired some of the damning film it was holding and newspapers around the country offered surveys of the 'ten worst cults.'

There was but a brief time lag between revelations about the deaths at Jonestown and popular attempts at interpretation. The first reports by the mass media were descriptive and incomplete, journalists rushing in a frenzy to find experts who could help provide background on Jones' otherwise minimally publicized group (Weineck, 1979: 2-3). These were followed shortly by books written by reporters who had accompanied Ryan to Guyana (Kilduff and Javers, 1978; Krause, 1978). Somewhat later there appeared book-length accounts by ex-Peoples Temple members (Kerns, 1979; Mills, 1979; Thielman, 1979). All of these first wave accounts of Jonestown served to build the sensationalistic and pathological interpretation of Peoples Temple which has continued to dominate the public conception of the group and its history.

The Legacy of Jonestown

The legacy of Jonestown involved two analytically separate sets of consequences for the ACM, cultural effects which involved definition of Peoples Temple and Jonestown as the symbolic embodiment of "destructive cultism," and control effects, which involved the development of organizational alliances or sanctions which enhanced the ACM's capability to combat NRMs. It seems clear in retrospect that the ACM had hoped for and anticipated greater control effects than have been forthcoming, but that the cultural effects have been more substantial.

Control Effects

The impact of the events at Jonestown on the ACM organizationally must be understood in the context of the timing of those events relative to developing anti-cult strategy. As previously noted, the ACM had registered limited success in enlisting at least the nominal support of local and state officials in their battle against cults. A substantial number of families had decided to unilaterally resolve contested affiliations with NRMs through forcible deprogrammings. However, as the number of deprogrammings mushroomed, the practice became more visible and more contested, both inside and outside the ACM. New religious groups began initiating legal defenses, civil libertarians and mainline religious groups expressed opposition to the practice, and law enforcement agencies came under increasing pressure to intervene in forcible abductions. In order to legitimize deprogramming, the ACM began to seek extension of conservatorship provisions in state statutes. These laws had been widely enacted to permit family members to assume temporary legal custody of elderly relatives when age-related reduced decisional capacity threatened physical, mental or financial functioning. The ACM simply sought to extend this logic to include reduced decisional capacity allegedly resulting from cultic brainwashing. This became the centerpiece of ACM counter-cult strategy. If routinely granted conservatorship orders could be institutionalized, then individual family conflicts could be resolved, albeit at some financial and emotional cost, and cults could be dealt a potentially fatal blow as conversions would become contestable on a case-by-case basis.

The apocalypse at Jonestown occurred at precisely the moment when the ACM was seeking to institutionalize the practice of deprogramming. The number of deprogrammings was beginning to decline,

in part due to increasing legal problems confronting deprogrammers.[1] Conservatorships became more difficult to obtain as judges began to recognize that these provisions were not designed for the purposes to which they were being put in such cases. The ACM then sought to modify conservatorship provisions so as to incorporate cases of incapacity engendered by "cultic brainwashing." The most significant battle over these provisions occurred in New York, where the governor vetoed two separate measures passed by the state legislature in 1979 and 1980.[2] These defeats constituted a major blow to the ACM's central strategic initiative, one which would have carved out a major social control role for the ACM in organizing legally-sanctioned deprogramming.

Jonestown, of course, was the example invoked by the sponsors of these bills. In introducing his legislation, New York Assemblyman Howard Lasher noted that the Child Care Committee had "decided to take a look at the phenomena (sic) that swept America, that at least on one occasion what was known as Jonestown, created a tragedy where 900 people — more than 900 people died, and among those 900 people, more than 260 were children" (New York General Assembly, 1980: 7307-7308).

In fact, the ACM also repeated its call for official inquiry, and the events at Jonestown gave its cries new credibility and urgency. The result was a second hearing at the Capitol in 1979, again chaired by Senator Robert Dole. Witnesses included ACM leaders and activists, longtime sympathizers such as psychiatrist John Clark and law professor Richard Delgado, and others, including Jackie Speier, Congressman Ryan's legislative counsel who had accompanied him to Guyana and who was wounded during the ambush at the airstrip. Speaking of the alleged 10 million cult members in the U.S., Speier warned the hearing, "The most important fact about Jonestown is, it can happen again!"

What made the second hearing both more volatile and yet less useful to the ACM was Senator Dole's invitation — an apparent afterthought — to "the other side," i.e., leaders of religious liberties groups such as American Civil Liberties Union attorney Jeremiah Gutman and representatives of NRMs such as the Unification Church and The Way International. Having both sides present effectively muddied the waters by confronting legislators with the inescapable fact that the issues and evidence of cultic damage were not nearly as clear-cut as the ACM had portrayed them.

Accusations flew back and forth. Government officials friendly

to the ACM spoke of members of the Unification Church and other NRMs as "little more than automatons" and of anti-democratic, "power-lusting" leaders. NRMs were compared to Nazism, the Symbionese Liberation Army (which had kidnapped millionairess Patty Hearst), Charles Manson's "family," and, of course, Peoples Temple. On the other hand, religious libertarians castigated the hearing as a witch hunt and an inquisition, as a threat to religious liberty, and as unconstitutional (AFF, 1979).[3]

Though the 1979 "Dole Hearing" was the only significant congressional probe of NRMs in the wake of Jonestown, there were numerous state versions conducted throughout the United States (Shupe and Bromley, 1980: 225-230; Shupe and Bromley, 1985: Ch. 4). During a 1979 hearing before the Pennsylvania General Assembly, for example, a number of ACM representatives peppered their testimony with references to Jonestown. Rev. Richard Dowhower (1979: 7) concluded his remarks by stating, "I trust that the deaths of 900 members of the Peoples Temple in Guyana last December (sic) will not have been in vain if we today, at this time, can act wisely, powerfully, and courageously." A parent of a member of Hare Krishna added the following appeal:

> The threat of the cults is tremendous. They continue to destroy families, they use hypnotic techniques to recruit, indoctrinate, to get members to raise funds. And they become wealthy and powerful... The possibility of another Ghana (sic) is present in every cult that exists. The civil and human rights of parents and their children were violated by Jim Jones and Peoples Temple. And, the civil and human rights of parents and children are being violated by any (sic) cults. We need government help, we need government help to combat these threats. There is too great (sic), there is no way that we can do it alone (1979: 165).

These initiatives gave the ACM hope that at least there would be some meaningful official action taken against NRMs, even if it had taken a massacre of Guyana proportions to spur government interest and resolve.

The ACM's high expectations after the 1979 federal hearing and numerous local ones were eventually met with disappointment. There was very little official activity beyond symbolic public hearings. As post-

Jonestown polls (Richardson and Van Driel, 1984) and our own impressions from talking with public officials revealed, the public expressed mixed, rather than unified, sentiments about regulating NRMs, while legislators clearly saw the ominous First Amendment implications of introducing ACM-inspired bills for open debate. Thus, despite its quintessentially horrific qualities, the Jonestown tragedy did not provide a springboard for some national crackdown on cults. As one Justice Department official wrote to parents concerned about Jonestown:

> ...any investigation must be based on an allegation of a violation of Federal law. For example, as you are probably aware, the Federal Bureau of Investigation is investigating the murder of Congressman Ryan and other crimes related to the Guyana affair, over which there is Federal jurisdiction.
>
> The conclusion of this Department that 'brainwashing,' 'mind control,' and 'mental kidnapping' do not constitute violations of Federal law has not changed... We have also concluded that the possibility of drafting effective Federal criminal legislation in this area is unlikely.

Efforts to gain governmental support have continued, but without any more measurable success. The most recent example occurred in 1988 when the Cult Awareness Network, the latest organizational attempt by the ACM to build a viable nationwide coalition of regional and local anti-cult organizations, sponsored a conference in Washington, D.C. Its purpose was a campaign reminiscent of the late 1970s' efforts to persuade Congress to investigate NRMs. This time a joint resolution was placed before both the House of Representatives and the Senate to officially designate November 13 - 19, 1988, the ten-year anniversary of the Jonestown tragedy, as "National Cult Awareness Week." The resolution bore all the familiar earmarks of classic ACM ideology: accusations of brainwashing and unethical psychological manipulation of NRM members, references to the Bill of Rights and individual liberty, undocumented exaggerations of the total number of cults ("over 2500") and cult members (one to three million) in the United States, and a blanket description of NRMs as a rampant health danger. The resolution used the occasion of the anniversary to request that the President "issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to

observe the period [November 13 - 19] with appropriate programs, cere-
monies and activities."

The resolution's chief sponsor is Rep. Tom Lantos, a Democrat
who holds Leo Ryan's old seat; one of Ryan's daughters served for a time
as Lantos' assistant and has become involved in the ACM. It wasn't
Lantos' first foray into ACM politics: in 1984, he sponsored legislation
posthumously awarding Rep. Ryan the Congressional Medal of Honor.
President Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law and personally be-
stowed the award.

Nevertheless, the road that the resolution faced was rockier
than that of the earlier legislation. It had attracted fewer than 40 co-
sponsors by February 1988 and had met the vigorous opposition of civil
libertarian and NRM lobbyists. The ACM's attempts to turn Jonestown
into a civil religious memorial and a politically-sanctioned forum for
ACM-sponsored events seemed unlikely to succeed.

This failure of Jonestown to galvanize official sanctions and
public sympathy was in any respects a major setback to the ACM. Two
activists bitterly wrote:

> The ritual deaths of more than nine hundred
> Americans in Guyana ... unfortunately did not lead to
> an awakened national concern about destructive reli-
> gious cults. Instead the tragedy came and went as just
> a media event. Its place in the public consciousness
> today seems mainly to be as one of the big stories of 1978.
> Americans seem unprepared to come to grips with the
> possibility that there are other Jim Joneses whose words
> are absolute to large followings, and who operate as if
> above the law and with frightening potential for violence
> and death (Swatland and Swatland, 1982: 146).

Cultural Effects

The events at Jonestown caught the ACM by surprise as much
as they did the mass media and public at large. Despite ACM ideology
which portrayed cult leaders as egomaniacal, manipulative charla-
tans, and their followers as being duped or coerced into becoming servile
slaves, no ACM spokesperson had forecast individual or mass suicides.
Like the rest of American society, the ACM initially had to deal with the
shock of Jonestown. But within a few months, the ACM caught up with
the events of Jonestown and assimilated them into its folklore. There

was inestimable symbolic value for a countermovement in an event such as Jonestown, regardless of its immediate pay-off in mobilizing official repression. As a shock-element symbol of suffering and outrage, Jonestown has no peer. As a result, countless numbers of ex-NRM members and critics have titillated church youth groups, civic clubs, small-town journalists, and all who would listen with the event's macabre scenario. Testimonies of persons who had been in NRMs otherwise unrelated to Peoples Temple could, by evoking its imagery, immediately transport their listeners to a realm of gruesome horror.[4] The ACM folklore of a "suicide cult"-threat running amok in America held its grip tenaciously in popular culture even a decade after the anomalous event. More widely, violence became a major theme in the public discussion of cults and served as a rallying point for tying all NRMs together in a single anti-social stereotype.

There were several ways in which Jonestown was symbolically invoked on behalf of the ACM: as vindication of ACM allegations about the destructiveness of cults, to link other cults to Peoples Temple in terms of violence potential, extending the range of groups possessing cultic attributes, and creating solidarity within the ACM itself.

Some spokespersons claim to have foreseen such a tragedy, and ACM publications assumed an "I-told-you-so" posture. For example, a newsletter of the International Freedom Foundation (IFF), a Midwestern ACM group, stated:

> It is now obvious that groups such as IFF have not been exaggerating in our allegations as to the severe consequences of cult involvement. The tragedy in Jonestown is concrete evidence that large groups of people can be controlled by charismatic leaders who manipulate their lives, even to the point of death. As you know, our purpose has been to reveal to the public the potentially destructive activities of groups such as Peoples Temple and to urge our government to take the necessary steps to protect cult victims and to provide avenues for their rescue (cited in Shupe and Bromley, 1980: 214-215).

Similarly, Ted Patrick, an early vigilante anti-cultist who specialized in aggressive application of coercive deprogrammings, stated in a *Playboy Magazine* interview in early 1979:

Playboy: Do you think we could have a tragedy here in this country on the scale of what happened in Guyana?
Patrick: I think they're going to start happening like wildfire.
Playboy: Murders and mass suicides?
Patrick: Yes. Those organizations are multimillion-dollar rackets, and if Congress is not forced by the public to do something, the cults are not just going to give up their paradises without a fight... The Jonestown suicides and murders weren't anything compared with what's going to happen. There's going to come a time when *thousands* of people are going to get killed right here in the United States (cited in Siegelman and Conway, 1979:60).

Ex-members of NRMs, particularly apostates from Korean evangelist Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, suddenly stepped forward to announce that they, too, recalled having been given suicide instructions in the event they were "captured" by deprogrammers. In an article titled "Suicide Training in the Moon Cult" in the January 1979 issue of *New West* Magazine, five ex-Moonies told how they had attended lectures and discussions encouraging suicide as a last-resort measure if faced with deprogramming. They were given anatomy lessons on how to most effectively slash their wrists, they reported, and encouraged to create ways to defeat their captors in death. Said one apostate Moonie woman:

I decided I would go to the bathroom where the deprogrammers were holding me, unscrew the light bulb, stand in the sink, and stick my finger in the socket... (cited in Carroll and Bauer, 1979: 62).

Another typical media account of would-be suicide by an ex-Moonie read:

They took me to an apartment where two kids were going to deprogram me ... but I was trained in suicide. I was going to commit suicide. I tried to jump out of the car to search for razor blades (Mulcahy, 1981).

At the very least, the speeches of ACM leaders, their publications' editorials, and the mass media accounts in general began comparing Jonestown with every other NRM when the controversy was discussed. In particular, photographs of Sun Myung Moon were often paired with Jim Jones. Ex-NRM members, such as former Moonie Christopher Edwards, who wrote of their experiences in expose books, went out of their way to link their own personal cultic experiences with the larger, more sinister context of Jonestown. In the foreword to his book, *Crazy for God*, Edwards stated: "Although a different group was involved, I believe it is also a story which may help to explain the paranoia and absolute obedience which led to the recent horror of the Peoples Temple murders and mass suicide" (1979: ix). In the epilogue, Edwards added this observation: "The tragedy of Guyana illustrates one of the many horrifying alternatives for cult members who have pledged their lives to their leaders" (1979: 233). Other ACM authors also linked the general "cult concern" to Peoples Temple, some with obvious relish (see, e.g., Keiser and Keiser, 1987; Appel, 1983; Rudin and Rudin, 1980).

Likewise, ACM groups possessed a treasure house of "insider" NRM publications taken during deprogrammings, including copies of publications and speeches. These they mined for material to support the "Guyana fever" they hoped to inspire. For example, Rev. Sun Myung Moon exhorted his followers for years with rhetorical, metaphor-rich sermons which were on record (Bromley and Shupe, 1979), and the ACM gladly made them accessible to journalists writing post-Jonestown stories. One of the most often repeated quotes was the following excerpt from one of Moon's speeches in his *Master Speaks* series:

> Have you ever thought that you may die for the Unification Church? ...will you complain against me at the moment of death? Without me on earth, everything will be nullified. So, who would you want to die, me or you? (cited in Shupe and Bromley, 1982: 117).

Siegelman and Conway, whose 1978 *Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change* had become an influential expression of ACM ideology, next turned to debunking evangelical, charismatic, and fundamentalist Christians in their sequel, *Holy Terror*, by implicitly linking these groups to Peoples Temple. With the precision of hindsight, they wrote:

> *Snapping* was a look at the religious cults and mass-
> marketed therapies that first came to public attention in
> that decade, and at the powerful ritual techniques they
> use to bring about sudden conversions and profound
> alterations of human awareness and personality. Six
> months after the publication of *Snapping*, this specter
> of cult mind control swept down with unprecedented
> horror in the Peoples Temple massacre in Jonestown,
> Guyana. The gruesome jungle mass suicide shook one
> of the most broadly held myths of Americans: that any
> group which elects to call itself a religion is automati-
> cally above suspicion in its conduct and deservingly
> exempt from public inquiry (1982:4).

Similarly, Garvey linked Mormonism to Peoples Temple:

> The debacle of the Peoples Temple under the leadership
> of Jim Jones has created a continuing concern over the
> manner and mode in which self-appointed messianic
> leaders and charlatans are able to capitalize on the
> universal longing for a better society. The Peoples
> Temple did not simply appeal to the pathologically de-
> pendent or the gullible. It attracted members at all levels
> of society and of widely differing degrees of sophistica-
> tion. In part, its appeal was due to the inherent seduc-
> tiveness of a final and totalistic explanation for the
> profound question of human existence. A comparison
> with an earlier movement that sought to found a utopian
> state in an isolated location under the aegis of a charis-
> matic and controversial leader may provide a greater
> understanding of the denouement in Guyana. Al-
> though this earlier movement still flourishes and
> thrives as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day
> Saints... it presents certain attributes which bear an
> eerie similarity with the Peoples Temple (Halperin,
> 1983:59).

Finally, Jonestown was used within the ACM to symbolically
support its own agenda. For example, it was employed in deprogram-
mings. As one former member of the Unification Church indicated:

> The finale of Meg's deprogramming was a television
> tape of a 90 minute documentary which included some
> secret film of Jim Jones haranguing his Peoples Temple
> subjects, black robed and waving a Bible in an upraised
> hand ("Scenario Set to Spring a Child," 1983).

In another case, a former NRM member praised her deprogrammer for
saving her from a Jonestown-like fate:

> ...I feel my deprogrammer saved my life in bringing me
> out of the cult. I mean that quite literally in light of what
> happened at Jonestown. I believe something like that
> could happen in any cult. While I almost hated my
> deprogrammer at times, I am grateful for what he did
> for me (McManus and Cooper, 1984: 72).

The California-based Citizens Freedom Foundation, the oldest and
largest ACM organization, designated an annual Leo J. Ryan Memorial
award to outstanding spokespersons against NRMs, thereby preserving
the sacredness of the massacre and rededicating core members' resolu-
tion to resist NRMs[5]

Conclusions:
Assessing the Impact of Jonestown

Our analysis of the consequences of Jonestown for the develop-
ment of the ACM has indicated that the spectacular demise of Peoples
Temple did not fulfill ACM leaders' expectations. It certainly has
proven useful as a cultural touchstone as Peoples Temple has become a
symbolic incarnation of "destructive cultism." However, the ACM was
unable to convert Jonestown into the impetus necessary to mobilize
public support for a full-fledged campaign against cults. Why did
Jonestown fail as a watershed event? In our view, there are several
reasons.

First, the ACM has been consistently unable to define the con-
cepts of "destructive," "cult," and "brainwashing" in such a way as to
neutralize opposition from civil libertarians and mainline churches
which might be swept up in the hysteria of an anti-cult campaign.
Although Peoples Temple conformed in certain respects to ACM con-

ceptions of a cult, in other respects it complicated rather than eased the differentiation of "benign" and "dangerous" groups. In contrast to most NRMs, the membership was disproportionately black, lower socio-economic status, and over-represented by both elderly and pre-adolescent age groups (Weineck, 1979; Richardson, 1980). More significantly, Jones was an ordained minister, and for years Peoples Temple had been an unremarkable church affiliated with the Disciples of Christ denomination. It was *not* typical of NRMs that the ACM had spent almost a full decade describing and decrying. Indeed, one ACM author acknowledged this:

> The Peoples Temple, in its twenty years, could not even be described as a cult, but was a Protestant church with a charismatic leader. Over time, as Jones developed a grandiose vision of himself and began to demand sacrifices from his followers, the nature of his organization began to change. A hierarchy developed, replacing what had been a loosely structured egalitarian group, and the freedom of his followers was gradually curtailed. At first, members of Jones' congregation were free to come and go as they pleased and were not required to renounce the outside world in any way, but by the time the group reached Guyana, Jonestown was a prison ruled by a messiah whose word was law (Appel, 1983: 18-19).

If ordinary churches could become more (or less) cultic over time, heading off "destructive" tendencies potentially might have to involve monitoring of even apparently legitimate groups and developing procedures for intervention. Few mainline churches were likely to voluntarily assent to such prospects simply because, or even if, one group had immolated itself.[6]

Second, as time went on, the credibility of Jonestown as a harbinger of increased cult violence was undercut by the failure of any even remotely similar incidents to recur. The prophecies of apocalypse were unfulfilled. After some years, the assurances that Jonestown was just the beginning of a destructive cult trend failed to hold public attention as more pressing social problems presented themselves. Further, several years after the first, sensationalistic waves of written accounts of Jonestown, more serious books began to appear which

undermined the simplistic, maniacal guru interpretation of Peoples Temple history. Social scientists have pored over the various possible meanings of the Jonestown tragedy: as an anomalous happening (Richardson, 1980), as an explainable, if extreme, event in historical and sociological context (Robbins, 1986; Weightman, 1983), as a logical extension of power and control in a tightly knit world-transforming movement (Johnson, 1979), as the outgrowth of its "worldview" (Chidester, 1988), or as the outcome of an intense conflict between sect and society (Hall, 1987). All of these later accounts offer considerably more complex analyses of Peoples Temple, accounts which would seriously undermine ACM prognostications.

Third, the very conflagration at Jonestown undermined the ACM campaign.[7] Jonestown left no real group of survivors, angry or otherwise. There were few ex-members to come forward and lay out in lurid detail for future audiences what they had experienced. There was virtually no one with whom a stunned public could identify. The surreal qualities of this little-known group destroying itself in an exotic jungle made it a poor competitor for public sympathy compared to better known endangered groups such as American hostages in Iran. Further, Jonestown provided few surviving family members of Peoples Temple victims to use the increasingly favored and often-publicized ACM tactic of suing the cult for alleged damages. And, there was no one in Peoples Temple to sue, although some Jonestown survivors tried to sue Ryan's estate for having provoked the massacre ("Cult Survivors Sue Ryan Estate," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1979). Litigation relied on a supply of ex-members and a group of leaders who could be held accountable. Jim Jones robbed them of both. Finally, the very abruptness of Jonestown created a self-limiting quality to its propaganda value. By the time the outside world learned of Peoples Temple, the macabre scenario had played itself out. After the initial reports of the 900 deaths, there was little equally sensational news.[8] Other than a few members still living in San Francisco, a few ex-members, and grieving relatives, all the principal actors were dead. And, in the same way, the theory that Jones was responsible for manipulating his followers into death, which both the media and the ACM embraced immediately, left no target after his death.

Fourth, as we have previously discussed, the ACM itself was at a strategic transition point in late 1978 when Jonestown occurred. Organizationally, it was building on a decade of precarious financing

and aborted attempts to combine strong regional components into a compromise national federation (Shupe and Bromley, 1980). Strategically, it was exploring means to lend the "color of law" to coercive deprogrammings through temporary conservatorship orders. However, both deprogrammings and efforts to legitimize them had mobilized opposition to the ACM. A counter coalition of new religious groups, mainline churches, civil libertarians, and academics who had conducted research on NRMs formed to oppose ACM-sponsored legislation. The horror of Jonestown might have been expected to overcome such resistance, but it did not. Those events, horrific as they were, simply did not configure easily with the ACM campaign for legitimated conservatorships. The problem of how to distinguish mainstream and cultic groups remained unresolved.

Further, ACM attempts to mobilize support for its agenda on the basis of the debacle at Jonestown may have injured its cause. As time passed, it only became more clear how unique Jonestown was, and how implausible it was that violent proclivities in religious groups of any ilk could be reliably foreseen.

Finally, it was not long after Jonestown that the ACM, for a variety of reasons, began a strategy of coordinating civil suits by apostates against NRMs for infliction of emotional distress (Bromley, 1988a). This new strategy, which yielded some significant successes at the trial court level, did not rely on building a case that all NRMs were "Jonestowns in the making," although Jonestown imagery was frequently invoked by prosecution attorneys.[9] Rather than attempting to create a classificatory system which distinguished "benign" and "dangerous" groups, these court cases were driven by allegations of specific individual abuses within specific groups. Therefore, they relied on clinical expert witness testimony documenting deleterious consequences of group membership of practices to convince jurors that financial redress was warranted for particular acts of wrongdoing. As a result, Jonestown lived on culturally as the ultimate symbol of "destructive cultism," but receded as a key organizational resource in the ACM's counter-cult campaign.

Notes

1. Bromley reports, for example, that the number of deprogrammings from the Unification Church reached a high point in 1976 at 108; in fact, 189 of the 396 cases recorded between 1973 and 1986 occurred in 1975 and 1976. Thereafter, there was a decline until 1981, and the decrease may have been attributable in part to the events at Jonestown.

2. The legislative defeat in New York was particularly critical because New York has traditionally served as a precedent setter for other states lacking fulltime legislators and staff. Although similar bills were subsequently introduced in numerous other states, none of them came nearly as close to enacting such legislation.

3. Involvement of some ACM-affiliated clinicians in cult/brainwashing type cases actually predated much of the cult controversy. Dr. Margaret Singer, who later became a frequent expert witness in apostate suits against NRMs, had been an expert witness in the Hearst case (although she did not testify in open court). She also counseled former members of Peoples Temple.

4. It is interesting to note that in books, speeches and testimonies, references to Jonestown are typically found at the beginning or end. These references tend to set the stage dramatically or to serve as concluding moral lessons. This ordering may also indicate the difficulty ACM proponents faced in meaningfully integrating Jonestown with other NRM practices.

5. One of the recipients, for example, was Howard Lasher, who had sponsored the ACM's conservatorship legislation in New York.

6. An alternative would be for churches to all subscribe to some type of ethical practices agreement. Beginning in 1985, the American Family Foundation pursued this approach through a "Proposal to Develop a Code of Ethics for Religious Influencers Participating in a Pluralistic Society."

7. John Hall (personal communication) has suggested that, to the extent Jonestown was perceived as partly a product of the ACM

campaign, it may have actually constituted a negative rather than a positive factor in mobilizing support for the ACM.

8. The ACM, for its own part, had even failed earlier to draw into its network the one loosely organized small oppositional group made up of families of Peoples Temple members, the Concerned Relatives. For a discussion of the role of the Concerned Relatives in the Peoples Temple conflict, see Hall, 1988. As a result, the more protracted conflict between families, apostates and Peoples Temple was not publicly visible until after Jonestown.

9. Virtually all of the potentially precedent-setting cases remain on appeal as of this writing.

References

AFF. 1979. "Information Meeting on the Cult Phenomenon in the United States." Transcript of U.S. Senate Hearings on the Post-Jonestown Cult Situation. Lexington, MA: American Family Foundation.

Allen, Steve. 1982. *Beloved Son: A Story of the Jesus Cults*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Appel, Willa. 1983. *Cults in America: Programmed for Paradise*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Barker, Eileen. 1983. "Religious Movements: Cult and Anticult Since Jonestown." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12: 329-346.

Beckford, James A. 1985. *Cult Controversies: The Societal Response to the New Religious Movements*. London: Tavistock.

Bromley, David G. 1988a. "The Hare Krishna and the Anti-Cult Movement." In David Bromley and Larry Shinn, eds. *Krishna Consciousness in the West*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.

Bromley, David G. 1988b. "Deprogramming as a Mode of Exit: The Case of the Unificationist Movement." In David Bromley, ed. *Falling From the Faith*. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.

Bromley, David G. and Bruce C. Busching. 1988. "Understanding the Structure of Contractual and Covenantal Social Relations." *Sociological Analysis* 48.

Bromley, David G. and Anson D. Shupe, Jr. 1981. *Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bromley, David G. and Anson D. Shupe. 1979. *"Moonies" in America: Cult, Church and Crusade*. Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications.

Carroll, Jerry and Bernard Bauer. 1979. "Suicide Training in the Moon Cult." *New West*. January 29, pp. 62-63.

CEFM. 1976. "Unification Church: Its Activities and Priorities." Parts I and II. Arlington, TX: Committee Engaged in Freeing Minds.

Chidester, David. 1988. *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple and Jonestown*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Conway, Flo and Jim Siegelman. 1982. *Holy Terror*. Garden City: Doubleday & Co.

Conway, Flo and Jim Siegelman. 1979. *Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change*. New York: Delta.

"Cult Survivors Sue Ryan Estate." *Los Angeles Times*. October 12, 1979.

Edwards, Christopher. 1979. *Crazy for God*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Hall, John. 1987. *Gone From the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Hall, John. 1988. "The Impacts of Apostates on the Trajectory of Religious Movements: The Case of Peoples Temple." In David G. Bromley, ed. *Falling From the Faith*. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.

Hall, John. 1981. "The Apocalypse at Jonestown." Pp. 171-190 in Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, eds. *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Halperin, David. *Psychodynamic Perspectives on Religion: Sect and Cult*. Boston: John Wright/PSG, Inc.

Johnson, Doyle Paul. 1979. "Dilemmas of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of the Peoples Temple." *Sociological Analysis* 40: 315-323.

Keiser, Thomas and Jacqueline Keiser. 1987. *The Anatomy of Illusion: Religious Cults and Destructive Persuasion.* Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.

Kerns, Phil with Doug Weed. 1979. *Peoples Temple — Peoples Tomb.* Plainfield: Logos International.

Kilduff, Marshall and Ron Javers. 1978. *The Suicide Cult: The Inside Story of the Peoples Temple Sect and the Massacre in Guyana.* New York: Bantam.

Krause, Charles. 1978. *Guyana Massacre: The Eyewitness Account.* New York: Berkeley Publishing.

McManus, Una and John Cooper. 1984. *Dealing with Destructive Cults.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Mills, Jeannie. 1979. *Six Years with God: Life Inside Reverend Jim Jones's Peoples Temple.* New York: A & W Publishers.

Mulcahy, M.W. 1981. "Ex-Moonie: You Are Dealing with Fanatics." *Southbridge* [MA] *News.* October 9.

New York General Assembly. 1980. *Proceedings.* Albany, June 4.

Pennsylvania General Assembly. 1979. House Resolution No. 20. Introduced by Mssrs. Goebel, Lashinger and Pott. Harrisburg, March 6.

Richardson, James T. 1980. "Peoples Temple and Jonestown: A Corrective Comparison and Critique." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19: 23-25.

Richardson, James T. and Barend Van Driel. 1984. "Public Support for Anti-Cult Legislation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23: 412-418.

Robbins, Thomas. 1986. "Religious Mass Suicide Before Jonestown: The Russian Old Believers." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47: 1-20.

Rudin, Thomas and Marcia Rudin. 1980. *Prison or Paradise? The New Religious Cults.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

"Scenario Set to Spring a Child." *Seattle* [WA] *Post-Intelligencer,* May 1, 1983.

Shupe, Anson. 1987. "New Religious Movements When They Are No Longer So New: How Conflict Matures." Paper presented at an international symposium, "Cooperation and Conflict Between Contemporary Religious Groups." Chuo Academic Research Institute, Tokyo, Japan.

Shupe, Anson. 1985. "The Routinization of Conflict in the Modern Cult/ Anticult Controversy." *The Nebraska Humanist* 8: 26-39.

Shupe, Anson, and David G. Bromley. 1985. *A Documentary History of the Anti-Cult Movement.* Arlington: The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Social Research.

Shupe, Anson, and David G. Bromley. 1982. "Shaping the Public Response to Jonestown: Peoples Temple and the Anticult Movement." Pp. 105-132 in Ken Levi, ed. *Violence and Religious Commitment.* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Shupe, Anson, and David G. Bromley. 1980. *The New Vigilantes: Deprogrammers, Anti-Cultists, and the New Religions.* Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications.

Shupe, Anson, and David G. Bromley. 1979. "The Moonies and the Anti-Cultists: Movement and Countermovement in Conflict." *Sociological Analysis.* 40: 325-334.

Shupe, Anson, Bert Hardin, and David G. Bromley. 1983. "A Comparison of Anti-Cult Movements in the United States and West Germany." Pp. 177-194 in Eileen Barker, ed. *Of Gods and Men: New Religious Movements in the West.* Macon: Mercer University Press.

Siegelman, Jim and Flo Conway. 1979. "Playboy Interview: Ted Patrick." *Playboy Magazine.* March, pp. 59-60, 217.

Swatland, Susan and Anne Swatland. 1982. *Escape from the Moonies.* London: New English Library.

Thielman, Bonnie with Dean Merrill. 1979. *The Broken God.* Elgin: David C. Cook.

U.S. House of Representatives. 1988. H.J.R. 390, House Joint Resolution Establishing a "Cult Awareness Week," to the 100th Congress, 1st Session by Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA).

Weightman, Judith. 1983. *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides.* Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Weineck, David. 1979. "A Demographic Profile of Jonestown." Paper presented at annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Boston.

Cults, Society and Government

Chris Hatcher

Civilization is composed of four forms of human activity: government, art, science/technology, and religion/philosophy. In general, government, however primitive, provides the structure which allows the other forms of activity to exist and to develop. The citizens permit their day-to-day behavior to be largely determined by the laws of government. This clearly places a substantial degree of power in the hands of government and those who control it. By contrast, most civilizations recognize art, science/technology, or religion/philosophy as higher pursuits which government should serve to support, rather than serve to direct. Citizens turn to these forms to give meaning and hope for improvement to their day-to-day behavior. Leaders in art, science/technology, or religion/philosophy thereby acquire significant honor, respect, and potential power.

History has shown that religion/philosophy presents the most frequent competition to government for control of the citizenry. Religious leaders have characteristically sought to exercise their power by showing that the masses follow them, thereby compelling government to pay close attention to their interests. This is the model of the over-government. It is similar to the exercise of power by economic influence of large multinational business conglomerates. In principle, both economic and religious groups seek continued maintenance and growth of

their values through indirect, but substantial, influence. The over-government model of power is maintained as long as economic conditions are positive, and the social order is in a stable progression that does not directly confront traditional religious values. When either of these two conditions are violated, citizens become disaffected with the ability of government to provide for them. In the absence of day-to-day need satisfaction, many turn to religion to re-establish a sense of stable order and value to their lives. In response to this, religious leaders can and have altered governments in a marked and direct way. Iran is the most dramatic example of this process in modern history. The Shah of Iran exiled the Ayatollah Khomeini, relegated other religious leaders to minor positions, and pushed the social order rapidly toward an alien western model. Khomeini assumed a visible, political position, called followers to adhere to the letter of Allah's word, re-established power in Iran by control of the masses, and restored religion as a code of behavior for government as well as individual citizens.

While such large-scale religious responses occupy a major place in history, they are relatively infrequent. A much more common development is the creation of insulated religious subgroups. These subgroups draw for members from a citizenry disenchanted with economic conditions and the range of options of social values available to it.

Such disenchanted groups do not intend to form mass political power and gain a position of influence in the overgovernment, nor do they intend to replace or overthrow the present government. Rather, they seek to create an undergovernment. This undergovernment is designed to operate as a mini-state or principality within a host country. It does not wish to obtain responsibility for broader affairs of state, or for the maintenance of infrastructure. It does desire the protection of the government's laws in its dealings with the outside world, but, within its fortified boundaries, the religious subgroup or undergovernment wishes to operate unchallenged. In many instances, the laws and values of the subgroup are within the range permitted by the government, and there is no conflict. Sometimes, the law of the subgroup and the law of the government may conflict, but a judicial resolution is obtained. This can be seen in the successful battle of the Mennonites in the midwestern United States to educate their children in their own schools. In other circumstances, the subgroup may choose to leave one country rather than change their values, as did the Puritans and other similar groups in coming to America in the 17th century. However, increasingly, such religious subgroups have chosen to establish values

and laws within their boundaries that control property, psychological functioning, physical safety, and even the taking of human life. The deaths of over 900 members of the Peoples Temple in Jonestown, Guyana in 1978 are a clear reminder of the extent to which some of these subgroups may go.

This essay is designed to examine the modern phenomena of religious cults, with special attention to the points of conflict between cult practices and government law.

What is a Cult?

Thought on the development of religious groups and subgroups has been largely dominated by the Sect-Church Theory of Weber (1940), Niebuhr (1929) and Troeltsch (1949). Churches are viewed as occupying an established place within the social order, as having a basically inherited membership, and as restrained and ritualistic in their practices (Glock and Stark, 1965). In order to obtain this position, churches must compromise over time with the larger social order. This process of compromise leads to dissatisfaction on the part of some members who desire to restore the original religious traditions. A sect is then formed. The word sect derives from the Latin "sequi," to follow, not from the Latin "secare, sectum," to cut (Marty, 1960). The term designates a group having a common leader or distinctive doctrine, according to commonly accepted dictionaries. Sect members characteristically: (1) refuse to compromise values with the outside world, (2) promote lay, rather than professional, ministers, (3) require a conversion experience for membership, and (4) adopt a strict, literal interpretation of religious documents. New members are drawn from economically or socially deprived classes of society, and their underlying social protest is channeled into sect functions. Feelings of deprivation are replaced with feelings of religious superiority. Subsequently, sect self-discipline and hard work tend to produce economic success, with attendant respect and acceptance. In some cases, the economic aspect may come to predominate, as seen in the Oneida and Amana colonies in the United States. In others, the sect becomes a church or church-like, as seen in the Mormons, or the Amish.

Although many of their current members might disagree, religious subgroups labeled as cults are generally described by the following characteristics (West and Singer, 1980):

1. Cults are established by a strong, charismatic, self-pro-

claimed leader who controls both the distribution of authority and material wealth within the group.

2. The cult leader claims that he has been chosen by God or some great cosmic power and/or that the secrets of the universe have been revealed to him. This mandate appears as a book, pamphlet, or structured oral doctrine which is revised over time and becomes internally consistent.

3. A double set of standards is developed: one for internal behavior within the group, and one for use in the external world. The internal standards are superficially for open rules: clear rewards and consequences according to shared values. However, each member must pass through successive tests before he is exposed to all the rules. A portion of each cult's membership never does pass through all the tests. These members do know all the rules, but only all the rules at their level. An external set of standards is then developed for use in the outside world, because this world exists either to destroy the cult or as a source of funds for the cult. As the perceived threat to cult survival increases, so does the justification for deception and even violence toward the outside world.

4. Cults establish clear boundaries between the internal and external world. Members must accept new friends and new lifestyles. Families, relatives, friends, occupations must be placed in a secondary position to the cult or be discarded. Most cults will make an initial attempt to recruit family and friends of a new member. However, if they are not clearly swayed in the initial effort, they are sharply and severely excluded, as the cult closes ranks to retain its new recruit. New recruits rapidly learn that the existence of the internal world depends upon secrecy and structured isolation.

Clearly the four characteristics listed above could apply to some sects or other well-developed social groups. Neither theologians nor psychologists have been able to agree upon the sect-cult distinction. Since such groups do not label themselves as cults, their members may have a point in asking why their group is so designated. From a practical standpoint, the cult label is given when the above group characteristics are present *and* a major part of the external world perceives the group as destructive, violent, or too deviant to be assimilated into society.

How Do Cults Develop?

There are three basic theories of cult innovation (Bainbridge and Stark, 1979). The first is the psychopathology model which sees the cult

leader as achieving a cosmic vision during a schizophrenic, manic, or drug induced episode. This experience provides both new structure and meaning to a previously disturbed life. If the society contains other troubled individuals who perceive themselves as having similar problems and dissatisfactions, the leader is most likely to be successful in forming a cult group. Cult behavior has been associated with psychological diagnoses. Zweig (1932) identifies Mary Baker Eddy's inspiration to begin Christian Science as a classic case of hysterical illness followed by spiritual cure. Carden (1969) cites a manic depressive base in John Humphrey Noyes who started the Oneida Community. He alternated between periods of intense pursuit of personal "perfection," followed by "eternal spins" of depression and immobilization. Love Israel, who started the Love Family cult, has stated that his inspiring vision of fusion with another man occurred during a hallucinogenic drug experience.

In the psychopathology model, the cult leader will classically go through five stages of development (Silverman, 1967). In the first stage, the potential leader's emotional and social problems are too intense for typical societal answers. In the second stage, he focuses almost exclusively upon these problems and becomes socially isolated. Symbolically wandering in the desert or wilderness in the third stage, he now experiences visions stimulated by self-initiated sensory deprivation. In the fourth stage, the cosmic vision is received. In the fifth stage, the potential leader tries to tell others of his experience. Failure to interest others brings a return to psychological illness, while success means the start of the cult group.

The second model is that of the entrepreneur, where the leader consciously invents the cult in order to gain money, power, and/or recognition. Support for this model can be seen in two primary areas. First, a number of cult leaders simply do not show a history of development that would agree with the psychopathology model. Second, if the dedication and energy of the truly believing cult member is channeled into business efforts, the rewards can be substantial. Synanon, which moved from drug treatment program to cult, built gas stations, manufacturing operations, bus services, and other operations into a multi-million dollar enterprise. The Blackstone Rangers, one of the best known Chicago street criminal gangs, first embezzled thousands of dollars from the federal program designed to rehabilitate them in the 1970s and then became an Islamic-based cult church in the 1980s. The est program is one of the most successful within the entrepreneur

model, grossing millions of dollars each year. est's control over both trainers and members is relatively short-lived, and many est trainers have broken off to develop entrepreneur groups of their own. Scientology trainers that have also left to create new groups include Jack Horner's Dianology, H. Charles Berner's Abilitism, and Harold Thompson's Amprinistics. These hybrid groups follow the best principles of new business development, combining new and old ideas under fresh management.

The third model is labeled subculture-evolution. Both the psychopathology and entrepreneur models are keyed to the individual cult leaders. The subculture-evolution model shows some cults as evolving from group interaction, resulting in mutual conversion (Cohen, 1955). Such development can be seen in The Committee for the Future (CFF) (Bainbridge, 1976). CFF planned to colonize the planets, beginning with Project Harvest Moon, which would employ a surplus Saturn V rocket for the first effort. As the predictable technological barriers became evident, CFF turned to the cult practice of rituals of psychic and parapsychological experience. Another example is The Power, which began in London as a psychological service to help achieve superior human functioning (Bainbridge, 1978). The group gradually turned toward in-depth exploration of members' experiences, and the rejection of outsiders. This eventually resulted in a move to a remote location on the Yucatan coast of Mexico. In both cases, neither the origin of the cult nor its subsequent development was determined by individual leadership. Leadership existed, to be sure, but group consensus was the true determinant.

Backgrounds of Cult Members

In the study of cult groups, no other area has more opinions, and less research, than that of the backgrounds of cult members. Through the 1970s and 1980s cult members have been generally characterized as unhappy, goal frustrated, naive young people who have experienced a period of turmoil immediately prior to cult entry. Their families have been represented as fostering both indecisiveness and rebelliousness, as having weak father figures, and as having suppressed, angry, hostile family relationships. Some investigators have even gone beyond this point, and stated that 50% of members are mentally ill or 58% have schizophrenic/borderline diagnoses (Hopkins, 1978).

While some of the above characteristics are supported by pre-

liminary scientific study, the general picture is not. Ungerleider and Wellisch (1978) studied 50 cult members or former cult members by interview and psychological testing. No evidence of insanity or mental illness in the legal sense was found. MMPI data did show significant differences between current members and former members in the area of hostility management. Cult members demonstrated significantly higher anger toward family members and a significantly higher emphasis on overcontrol of hostility. Ross (1983) tested the entire population of the Hare Krishna Temple in Melbourne, Australia with the MMPI and other measures. All subjects scored within the normal range. A number of well-respected clinical investigators, such as Singer (1979), do report a period of high stress, loneliness, or existential crisis prior to cult induction. Most recruits do tend to be young, middle class, well educated, and without a life commitment at the moment of induction.

At this point, one cannot comfortably rely upon an explanation of individual mental illness, family pathology, or situational stress to account for the induction of so many people into contemporary cult groups.

The Recruitment and Induction Process

While there are some general characteristics which identify cult members, most members are neither mentally ill in the classic sense nor are they subject to abnormal stress prior to cult contact. If unique pre-cult vulnerability does not account for cult membership, one must logically examine the nature of the recruiting and induction process.

In modern history, the modification of individual belief systems by intentional group pressure and environmental manipulation has focused upon three events: the response of Jewish prisoners in Nazi Germany concentration and death camps, the so-called "brainwashing" of U.S. military prisoners of war during the Korean conflict by Chinese and North Korean communists, and the 900 murder-suicides of Peoples Temple members in Jonestown, Guyana.

The Nazi concentration and death camps clearly showed the lengths to which a dominant captor will go to act out his own internal aggressions and fantasies toward other individuals. However, the experiments and manipulations were largely individual acts within a broad governmental sanction of dehumanization and eventual death. The historical literature contains many examples of both courage and

primitive survival behavior within the camps. While individual beliefs and behavior were often radically altered, this was a side effect rather than a primary intention of the overall system. Such extreme captor behavior is frequently assumed to take place only in infrequent, isolated incidents. However, political scientists are quite knowledgeable of numerous examples of extreme captor behavior in recorded history, and psychologists have experimentally induced destructive captor behavior in normal subjects in laboratory situations. This can be seen in the Zimbardo (1977) prison study, in which college students were randomly assigned to guard and prisoner roles. After several days, the guard role-players had become so destructive that the experiment had to be stopped. Another example is in the Milgram (1963) studies, in which subjects were instructed to deliver increasing electric shocks to other subjects in another room. There were no subjects in other rooms, but each shock was accompanied by pre-recorded screams of increasing intensity. Many subjects would continue to administer the shocks, even after the screams became quite loud and indicative of a person in real pain. Thus, we know that, given opportunity and direction, a significant number of the population, as captors, will alter their prior belief systems and behavior, often to extreme lengths.

      The experience of U.S. military prisoners of war in North Korean camps was profoundly disturbing to American and western society. POW's with traditional stable backgrounds informed on their fellow prisoners, and made a number of statements accepting Chinese communist political values. This process of induction was intentional, highly organized, well supervised, and achieved a high rate of successful conversion. Lifton (1956) found eight components to the induction process: (1) environmental control, (2) mysticism substituted for logic in daily life, (3) demands for political and/or ideological purity, (4) personal confession, (5) acceptance of basic group dogma as sacred, (6) forcing language into polarizing terms, (7) submission of the person to doctrine, and (8) dispensation of existence. Few individuals appear to be able to withstand long-term successful manipulation of all eight components. Yet most people, when questioned about such induction techniques, will strongly deny any potential vulnerability. This individual denial of physical or psychological vulnerability allows one to make plans for the future, cross busy streets, avoid constant anxiety over unpredictable trauma, etc. Paradoxically, when a concentrated effort is made to expose a crack of vulnerability in this denial system, the result is often devastating to the integrity of the entire value and logic system. At this

point, the individual is most susceptible to a new, well-organized system to replace the one that appears to be failing at the critical moments.

More recently the attention of the world turned to the small jungle settlement of Jonestown, where more than 900 men, women, and children of Peoples Temple committed ritualistic murder-suicide. Temple members came from the full range of educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Whole family recruitment was specifically encouraged. Initial induction consisted of selective exposure to political power, sexual energy, and the successful social projects of the Temple with young people and the aged, promoted by enthusiastic members and by Jim Jones himself. The new or potential members' susceptibilities to motivations of political power, sexual power, or idealism were carefully assessed and utilized in the induction. However, these inducements were only partially granted, leaving the new member with still unful-filled fantasies and substantial residual guilt over the arousal of these long suppressed motivations. While the principle of manipulation being illustrated here is relatively simple, the real key to the results lay in the intensity and completeness with which it was carried out upon a new member. This gratification of primitive needs and arousal of guilt was constantly and irregularly varied to keep the member from becoming too confident about his own position. Over time, a substantial amount of personal detail on members was collected and fed to a central source for subsequent use by Jones or his designates. The depth of this personal knowledge could be employed to create an atmosphere of magical power, if a member attempted to leave the church. In addition, pressure would be brought upon other family members to either pull the member back into the church or eject him from his family.

Approximately 80 members who were in Georgetown, Guyana at the time of the deaths and the 200 members who were still in California survived. They have not revitalized the Temple nor have they joined other cults. This author, who studied Peoples Temple and its members extensively, has found that when the extensive apparatus of the system disappeared suddenly, attempts to restore it proved overwhelmingly difficult, and the members moved back into the larger society.

In contrast to Nazi Germany and the Korean "brainwashing" experiments, Peoples Temple was not a function of government and/or war. Among other things, it was, as discussed in the introduction, an example of the undergovernment. It was a group which did not seek to change the government, but only to keep government control away from the group's activities, both legal and illegal. Further, it was a group

whose history clearly qualifies it as dangerous, destructive, and with numerous, intentional violations of government law. Peoples Temple has become the accepted definition of dangerous cult in the public mind.

While the majority of cults have not been found to significantly violate government law, they do employ many of the techniques illustrated by our three highlights of the recent history of mind and behavior control. Knowledge about their ultimate intent with these techniques is confined to information from current or ex-cult members, neither of which can be classified as unbiased sources. However, the similarity of techniques is deeply unsettling to the larger society and its governments, because history has shown that such techniques frequently lead to violence and to civil rights violations.

The induction techniques employed by the majority of cults are surprisingly similar. Individuals who are targeted for recruitment are young — late adolescents and young adults — or frustrated by little life direction, or both. Contact is made by a sexually and physically attractive, personable, and verbal peer. Eye contact, smiling, and touching are utilized to create a sense of real interest in the recruit. The cult member, however, makes it clear that he or she is happy and has found a true direction for life. The true name of the cult is usually skillfully avoided in the discussion. The recruit is then invited to dinner that day to meet some friends who have similar goals. Later that evening, he is subjected to intense personal and physical attention by apparently happy, attractive people of both sexes. For a well-adjusted person, the impact of this process is momentarily disarming. It is both sophisticated and well-orchestrated. For an unhappy, less direction-oriented person, the impact is overwhelming. Most do not initially believe the friendliness, but the feelings and atmosphere are too good to reject. The next step is an invitation to a rural, religious retreat of several days duration. If the recruit accepts, the pace of activity increases, allowing only minimal time for rest and sleep. Both lack of sleep and gradual nutritional changes in diet produce a more suggestible, compliant recruit. If he wavers or attempts to leave, cult members display profound, personal hurt, rejection, and feelings of betrayal. Few people are used to having their mere presence or absence produce such a range of emotion in others. It becomes much easier to stay a few more days than to cope with this highly successful guilt arousal procedure.

As the days turn to months, this use of guilt is further applied to work for the cult. The recruit is made to see that most of his life has been a selfish pursuit or a competition with other selfish peoples. This is

relatively easy to do as competitive, survival themes dominate in most world cultures, especially in western Calvinist ethics. To attain the new goal of selflessness, the now new member must reject his previous selfish friends and family, and dedicate his work efforts to supporting the cult. Responsibility and decision-making is given over to others. This step is often the most difficult for outsiders to understand. But for the new member, struggling under a lifetime of instruction in achieving and independence, the cult state of dependence is experienced as a profound and welcome relief. Once in this position of dependence, it is extraordinarily difficult to leave.

Organization of the Group

The type of sophisticated mind and behavior control which we have been discussing cannot be programmed or completely dominated by the cult leader alone. Not every recruit can be held in this initial state of dependence if the cult is to survive. Any organization — cults included — must fulfill certain structural requirements. There must be management, material acquisition and distribution, accounting and fiscal control, production and/or solicitation of funds. Most critically, as the organization expands, there must be an increasing delegation of responsibility for decisions within the cult. The cult leader still retains ultimate authority and may extend that authority in an unpredictable fashion to illustrate his control, but some members must assume roles of leadership which cannot be supported by a simple dependence motivation.

This author's studies have identified two major roles and one minor, but highly significant, role in cult organizational structure. The first major role is that of the bureaucratic administrator. This role is concerned with the day-to-day operation of the group, not with policy. Members who seek out this role generally have a history of orderliness, mild achievement, and limited ambition. They have seldom functioned at a high administrative position, and see their talents as unrecognized. They are willing to accept temporary submission in the cult, but cannot totally rid themselves of their competitive, goal-oriented, limited ambition values. The cult's need for the bureaucratic administrator role provides a way for needs. For almost all members in this role, it is a lifetime career track in the cult. They may have great day-to-day power, and may sit in the policy-making council, but will not make policy or be advanced beyond this track. These members know that they are ex-

cluded from significant information about the cult, and strive to make themselves valuable by their administrative efficiency and obedience.

The second major role is the opportunist. He or she has curiosity, but little commitment to the ideals of the group. It is easy for him or her to assume a submissive position and acquire new values if the possibilities for subsequent gain appear good. This person rises to the attention of others by the ability to manipulate, or selectively inform upon others. The informing must be selective, indicative of loyalty, rather than indiscriminately passing information. As with various business organizations, they are quickly identified as "fast track" individuals. Their rise in the cult is quick, attaining a position on the policy-making advisory council in two to five years. Such members are usually between 25-35 years of age, with a high percentage of females. Almost all cult leaders are male, and many of these have directly indicated that their close female advisors are more aggressive, more loyal, and more creative in getting things done in the group. A number of females in this role have stated that they know that they could not attain a position of equal power and responsibility outside the cult. The skill of the cult leader lies in his selection and control of the opportunists in his advisory council. He must dominate them by superior psychological manipulation. With his greater practice and innate ability, he obviously succeeds most of the time.

A minor, but highly significant, role within cult organizations is that of the specialist. The specialist has a personal skill: manipulative, sexual, political, or violent. He or she is brought into the advisory council or to the leader to receive a particular assignment. This member has reduced duties within the cult, obtaining worth by the ability to carry out a given assignment and to keep that assignment reasonably confidential. Such individuals characteristically never rise to advisory council participation or true leadership. The specialist seems to be identified very early in his membership as having potential for this role. A two-to four-year period of testing and minor tasks occurs, followed by two to five years of utilization, followed by only occasional task activity. One cannot employ a manipulator of this type for too long. Their true function for the group becomes too public, and they become too competitive with other specialists for assignments important to the welfare of the cult. At this point, some specialists leave, while others seem to have "burn out." It is as if their previous successful activities have not only earned them a place within the group, but have also satisfied some primitive ego deficit. With this change, other newer specialists are developed.

Cults that are moving toward violence and crimes against the person demonstrate a distinct shift in doctrine followed by an organizational shift. The doctrine shift is from a vague, undefined point when group goals could be realized, to increased resistance of those goals by the larger society, to more defined, often specific, points when group goals and larger society goals will dramatically clash. The organizational shift is the creation of a security unit. The security unit is heavily populated with specialists in violence and is headed by a member in the opportunist role. Unit members are initially trained in defensive hand-to-hand combat, with gradual escalation into small firearms. As the governments of many countries have discovered, once created, such units become difficult to control. Most cult groups depend upon careful control and suppression of hostility and aggression. The security unit suddenly provides an active avenue for the expression of such impulses for some members and a vicarious avenue for many other members. Outside observers are often quite surprised at the speed with which such a change can take place within the group. Once such a wave of long suppressed hostility and aggression is released, it cannot be easily put away again. Cult leaders intuitively understand this. Further, they know that they must lead any emotional wave within the cult. The dynamics are now set and the rest of the organization shifts to support and maintain the security function. Examples of this process can be seen in Berkeley, California, where a Hare Krishna leader was arrested for stockpiling automatic weapons; in Switzerland where an Indian meditational guru was arrested for the murder of a Swiss government official; and in Los Angeles, California where two Synanon members carried out a rattlesnake attack on an anti-Synanon attorney.

Legal Issues

From this review, it can be seen that some, but not all, religious cults do pursue a violent course, resulting in both crimes against the person and against property. From a legal standpoint, how does government approach a balance between freedom of religion and protection of its citizens?

One example can be found in the United States Constitution, and in the subsequent case law. Under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the government may not establish a religion, nor may it prohibit the free exercise of religion. As reviewed by Delgado (1977) and Lucksted and Martel (1982), the freedom to believe in a given religious

system, or in no religious system, is absolute, but the freedom to act upon religious beliefs is not. Under this distinction, an individual's private beliefs are his own, but when those beliefs become action, they may infringe upon the rights of other citizens.

One can quickly anticipate that an aggressive government may conceivably label any action as religiously-based and take punitive action. Case law within the United States has produced three principal questions to be asked to determine the legality of governmental intervention: (1) Is there a sincere religious interest? (2) Is there government interference with the religion? and (3) Is there a government interest which may justify such interference?

The question of sincerity of religious interest has primarily evolved from cases from 1942-1976 on conscientious objector resistance to military service. A number of young men believed that their religious teachings prohibited them from taking another life, or actively supporting the taking of life by others. Some of these citizens, however, merely wished to avoid military service. In 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court held that belief could not be questioned, but that the sincerity of the belief could be questioned (*U.S. vs. Seeger* et al.) Specifically, the individual's history of behavior could be examined for consistency with his stated religious beliefs. Counseling services for potential conscientious objectors relatively quickly developed a series of responses to memorize which counteracted much of the force of this ruling. However, this and other decisions do provide a legal basis for examining religious sincerity in a U.S. court of law.

The questions of government interference with religion have primarily been decided in favor of religion. In landmark cases striking down requirements to work on a religious holiday (*Sherbert v. Verner*) and compulsory public school attendance (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*), the U.S. Supreme Court has shown that the government interest must be of quite substantial magnitude to warrant interference. Such substantial interest and subsequent intervention can be seen in cases involving human sacrifice, withholding of medical care from children, child abuse, and kidnapping. However, consensual acts between adults have been progressively held not to be illegal, including the transfer of large sums of money, physical or sexual abuse, mind control, and other forms of highly submissive behavior.

The problem then turns upon the word consensual. In *Turner v. Unification Church* (1978, 1979), an ex-member alleged involuntary servitude through several relevant sections of U.S. Code, and the

13th Amendment to the Constitution. In rejecting the case, the U.S. District Court most critically stated that the ex-member must demonstrate that "elements of both physical restraint and complete psychological domination must be present" (Lucksted and Martel, 1982: 18). Given the sophistication of cult methods of control, it would be extremely difficult to legally meet criteria of this nature.

Frustrated by the lack of legal avenues available to them, many parents and relatives have sought the services of deprogrammers. Deprogrammers are generally ex-cult members in their late twenties or thirties. They kidnap the cult member, seclude him in a house, and institute a series of conditioning procedures remarkably similar to those used by the cult in its induction. In the first several days, cult inconsistencies are hammered at over and over again. This is followed by an angry confrontation with parents and previous friends. Presumably, this catharsis of long held resentment toward the parents loosens the hold of the cult, and speeds a return to the larger society.

In counter-attacking, cults have brought charges of kidnapping or false imprisonment against their members' parents or agents of their parents. In both *Peterson v. Sorlien* (1980, 1981) and *Weiss v. Patrick* (1978, 1979), the courts have rejected these charges, citing parental rights to freely communicate. While it is certainly questionable that these decisions would withstand a test before the U.S. Supreme Court, they do indirectly support deprogramming as a viable parental choice.

Local, state and federal governments within the U.S. have, on occasion, determined some cults to be a threat to the larger society, but they have also been frustrated by a lack of direct legal avenues. At times, this has resulted in the use of indirect legal avenues, such as violations of laws pertaining to immigration laws, income tax status as a religious institution, health codes, building codes, and laws regulating solicitation of funds. Such avenues, while successful in the legal sense, have not significantly halted cult growth, and have reinforced cult feeling that the larger society is harassing them. A more direct method would be to develop new legislation which would require disclosure in soliciting funds or recruiting members, and which would preclude organizations from complete restriction of an individual's contact with the larger society. Such legislation has yet to be put forward in the United States, either on a state or federal level.

As a final note, some cults have become quite aware of this potential for new legislation against them, and have proceeded to gain

control of a governmental unit. An example of this is the Rajneesh group in Antelope Valley, Oregon. This group specifically selected an isolated town with a small population, bought large tracts of property, moved in thousands of member residents, and voted themselves into complete control of the area. Although the cult members later abandoned Rajneeshpuram, turning the town back over to its original name and former residents, the entire takeover procedure was legal. It is entirely feasible for other cults with large memberships and substantial financial resources to duplicate this technique, and indeed, there is evidence that the Church Universal and Triumphant may be employing the same tactic in the Paradise Valley in Montana north of Yellowstone Park.

Summary

This paper has examined the place of religious cult groups and their relation to government, reviewing attempts at cult definition, cult development, backgrounds of members, indoctrination processes, cult organization, and legal issues. The following conclusions are relevant.

1. The label "cult" is a combination of certain group characteristics and the belief by larger society that the group is destructive, violent, or too deviant to ever be assimilated into society.

2. Cults may develop by the psychopathology model, the entrepreneur model, or the subculture-evolution model.

3. There is insufficient evidence to rely upon an explanation of individual mental illness, family pathology, or situational stress to account for the induction of such large numbers of citizens into contemporary cult groups.

4. The recruiting and induction process is highly similar from cult to cult, and is applied with an extraordinarily high level of sophistication.

5. The organization of cult groups is similar, with several identifiable roles.

6. Some cults have demonstrated a significant history of violence and criminal activity. Such groups demonstrate a distinct shift in doctrine, followed by an organizational shift. These shifts can occur relatively rapidly.

7. Many governments support freedom of religious belief, but may place constraints upon freedom of religious action.

8. Most governments do not currently have direct legal avenues which are applicable to the type of psychological domination utilized by cult groups, and have therefore sometimes employed indirect legal means, such as immigration and tax violations.

9. Cult groups represent a growing, adaptable, sophisticated social phenomena. Some of these groups will continue to significantly violate citizens' rights until government applies itself to the difficult task of producing new legislation in this area.

References

Bainbridge, W. S. 1976. *The Spaceflight Revolution.* New York: Wiley.

Bainbridge, W. S. 1978. *Satan's Power.* Berkeley: University of California.

Bainbridge, W. S. and Stark, R. 1979. "Cult Formation: Three compatible models." *Sociological Analysis* 40: 283-295.

Carden, M. L. 1969. *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.

Cohen, A. K. 1955. *Delinquent Boys.* New York: Free Press.

Delgado, R. 1977. "Religious totalism: Gentle and ungentle persuasion under the First Amendment." *Southern California Law Review* 51: 1.

Glock, C. V. and Stark, R. 1965. *Religion and Society in Tension.* New York: Rand McNally.

Hopkins, R. P. 1978. "The hospital viewpoint: Mental illness or social maladjustment." *Journal of the National Association of Private Psychiatric Hospitals* 9(4): 19-21.

Lifton, R. 1956. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Lucksted, O. D. and Martel, D. F. *Cults: A Conflict between religious liberty and involuntary servitude?* FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, April 1987: 16-21 (Part I), May 1982: 16-23 (Part II), June 1982: 16-21 (Conclusion).

Marty, M. D. 1960. "Sects and cults." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 332: 125-134.

Milgram, S. 1963. "Behavioral study of obedience." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology_* 67: 371-378.

Niebuhr, H. R. 1929. *The Social Sources of Denominationalism.* New York: Holt.

Peterson v. Sorlien, 299 N.W. 2d 123 (1980), cert. denied, 450 U.S. 1031 (1981).

Ross, M. W. 1983. "Clinical profiles of Hare Krishna devotees." *American Journal of Psychiatry.* 140(4): 415-420.

Sherbert v. Verner, 374 U.S. 398, 10 L. Ed. 2nd 965, 83 S Ct. 1790 (1963).

Silverman, J. 1967. "Shamans and acute schizophrenia." *American Anthropologist* 69: 21-32.

Singer, M. T. 1979. "Coming out of cults." *Psychology Today,* pp. 72-83.

Troeltsch, E. 1949. *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches.* New York: Macmillan.

Turner v. Unification Church, 473 F. Supp. 367 (D.R.I., 1978), aff'd., 602 F 2d 458 (1st Cir., 1979).

Ungerleider, J. T. and Wellisch, D. K. 1979. "Coercive persuasion (brainwashing), religious cults, and deprogramming." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 136(3): 279-282.

Weber, M. 1940. "The social psychology of the world's religions." In Gerth and Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Weiss v. Patrick, 453 F. Supp. 717 (D.R.I.), aff'd., 588 F. 2d 818 (1st Cir., 1978), cert. denied, 422 U.S. 929, 99 S. Ct. 2858, 61 L. Ed. 2d 296 (1979).

West, L. J. and Singer, M. T. 1980. "Cults, quacks and nonprofessional psychotherapies." In Kaplan, H. I., Freedman, A. M., and Sadock, B. J. (eds.), *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry.* Vol. III (3rd Edition). Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins.

Wisconsin v. Yoder, 406 U.S. 205, 32 L. Ed. 2nd 15, 92 S Ct. 1526 (1972).

Zimbardo, P. G., et al. 1977. *Influencing attitudes and changing behavior: An introduction to method theory, and applications of social control and personal power.* Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Zweig, S. 1932. *Mental Healers.* New York: Viking.

Jim Jones' Future
in American Mythology

Michael Phillips

Three masked children in dark and ghoulish cloaks ring the front door of my musty apartment in London near St. James Park. With a heavy public school accent, they shout "a penny for the guy."

They and millions more like them are commemorating the anniversary of the arrest of Guy Fawkes in November 1605. Fawkes, an upper class expatriate, was found guilty and executed for placing twenty barrels of gunpowder in a tunnel under Parliament with the intent of killing King James inside. He was part of a Roman Catholic group that had conspired together for nearly two years and were discovered just in time.

The plot to kill the king and destroy Parliament by followers of the Pope left an indelible and mythic memory in the English psyche.

Jim Jones and the Jonestown mass suicide fit so perfectly into a core American mythology that it is already haunting our national psyche and may permanently become a mythic symbol in our society. The role that Guy Fawkes plays in England, the role that Marie Antoinette plays in France, Jim Jones may eventually play in this country.

There is no single or unanimous view of American mythology. It is difficult to establish any widely acceptable statements about our society because we have very divergent views of our own social history. Who we are, where we come from, and what we believe are vague concepts to begin with. And they become even more problematic because our general education system does not teach them with any consistency.

Before we can feel comfortable talking about American mythology, it is important to see who Americans are. Some writers such as

Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung feel comfortable finding Kali images in our myths, even though Kali is a figure from India. Others feel comfortable with the Greek myths of Atlas and Zeus, because they see Greek classics as American classics and find Greek gods in American comic books.

But when we talk about mythology in America, we are talking about white mythology. Whites represent the dominant culture group, comprising 88% of the U.S. population. Blacks make up almost 11%, and less than 2% have other skin color, according to the U.S. Statistical Abstract. This is not to say that black and other sub-culture Americans do not deserve consideration in national mythology. They do, but their influence is no greater than their numbers. The Uncle Remus stories, for example, came from Africa, and other than the names of the characters — Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox and Brer Bear — only the story of the Tar Baby is known by even a tiny fraction of the nation's majority white population.

Although numerous cultures form a dense and varied American culture, the dominant heritage is Nordic. In 1790, when our government was formed, 86% of the white population came from the Nordic areas of England, Germany, Holland, Sweden and Protestant Ireland. The remaining 14% were of Celtic origin, from Scotland, Catholic Ireland and France. Those percentages remained the same for the next fifty years, during a calm period of immigration to the U.S. Even during the peak periods of influx into America from foreign lands — from 1850 to 1920 — the number of immigrants remained under one percent of the total population.

The Nordic tradition manifests itself in our major national holidays. Christmas is Nordic — there was no snow, pine trees, yule logs, or Santa Claus with reindeer in Bethlehem — as is our date for New Year's. Moreover, our two national holidays honoring the dead, Memorial Day and Veterans' Day, honor those who died in war. That emphasis is understandable, considering that the Nordic heaven was Valhalla, the home of valiant heroes and heroines who were killed in battle. They are nevertheless quite distinctive and unlike the Latin, Celtic, Hispanic or Asian holidays related to death, such as the French Mardi Gras and the Japanese O'Bon, which speak of ghosts and spirits.

To get a more pragmatic view of our mythology, it is helpful to look at children's library books, and to consider what stories and rhymes most ten-year-olds know. For many decades, the most popular library books, and the best selling children's books in bookstores, have been the

stories of Hans Christian Anderson, followed by the Brothers Grimm. All are of Nordic origin. Moreover, when I asked a class of white fifth grade students in Mill Valley, California, to write down the five story titles that most readily came to mind, the Nordic fairy tales of Anderson and Grimm topped the lists. The two most popular current stories, *Charlotte's Web* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, are directly derived from that tradition. When I asked for five rhymes, the entries listed most often were Jack and Jill, Humpty Dumpty, and Jack Be Nimble. All are from Mother Goose. All are Nordic.

The Protestantism in America also reflects our Nordic roots, and that religion has had a profound effect upon American mythology. The name — the very existence — of Protestants comes from a rejection of the authority of the Catholic Church and its papal hierarchy. The Puritans — also living up to their names — didn't believe the Church of England's separation from the Roman Catholics was sufficient, and their exodus from England eventually brought them to America in the early 1600s.

From those roots, Protestantism has grown into the dominant religion in America, with two-thirds of today's population offering that description of themselves. A quarter of the population is Catholic, and the balance are principally Jews and non-believers.

We can proceed to consider American mythology with the understanding that the dominant culture in America is white, Nordic, and Protestant. What, then, are the myths that are relevant to Jonestown?

There are three: first is that fear is our primary motivation, rather than shame, guilt or sorrow; second, that individual triumph is the ultimate triumph; and third, that groups are bad and that large, cohesive groups are very bad.

Different cultures rely on different distress emotions — fear, shame, guilt, and sorrow among them — as primary motivations. The Chinese and Japanese fill their myths with shame as a human motivation. That shame is especially deep when the individual deviates from the interests of the family as a whole. In those Eastern cultures, nothing can be worse.

For Slavs, sorrow is the motivating distress emotion. The Soviet government never stops reminding its people of the sorrow left by the deaths of 20 million people during World War II. The czars of past centuries used earlier wars for the same reasons. Indeed, sorrow resulting from the loss of a friend or family member is the most painful emotion a Slav can evoke.

The legacy of guilt in the Jewish tradition runs from the early days of the Bible to the Holocaust of the 20th century. It still lives, as the raison d'etre of the Jewish state of Israel, and in contemporary Jewish humor.

For Americans, though, the greatest emotional distress is fear — fear of isolation, fear of poverty, fear of death — and its manifestations are measurable. More than half of the insurance sold in the world is sold to Americans, a figure completely out of proportion to any other demographic or financial element.

Fear underlies our social myths as well. In contrast to the myths of other cultures, the American mythic hero, Superman, is popular among his friends, has a good salaried job, and can't be killed. Batman is wealthy and has a butler. The Tooth Fairy brings money. Santa Claus increases our material possessions. Cinderella, the mythic outcast, is redeemed when she marries the prince. They are all immune to isolation, poverty, and death.

While our heroes transcend our fears, we use fear ourselves for motivation in business. We call it the work ethic. Owners of large and small businesses work hard so their competitors won't get the upper hand and threaten to close them down. Laborers accept low wages or part-time jobs so they won't have to spend time on the unemployment line or, worse, on welfare.

America's amusement parks are centered on fear-producing rides of all sorts, from roller coasters to rocket sleds. Few of those rides are found in Africa, Arabia, Asia or Latin America.

Hollywood's horror movies like "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and "Psycho" rely on isolation, lack of economic protection and the prospect of death to create the emotion of fear. While these movies maintain their popularity everywhere in the U.S., they are virtually unknown in non-fear cultures.

Our second myth, the myth of the triumphant individual such as John Wayne, Horatio Alger and Perry Mason may seem like a natural form of mythic hero to us, but such heroes are far from universal. Some cultures glorify those who triumph by supporting their family, who accept a less than desirable job to salvage a friendship, or who commit suicide to protect a reputation. Other cultures define their heroes as those who take on a difficult or demeaning task for the good of their nation, or who accept poverty and starvation for the good of their tribe or their own soul. Triumphant individualism is principally a Nordic concept.

When these first two myths — fear and triumphant individuals — converge, we get one interesting American phenomenon: our disdain for suicide. Suicide is generally illegal in Protestant countries, and people who fail in their attempts are arrested and become wards of the state. The Catholic cultures of Celtic and Hispanic countries usually don't legislate against suicides, based on the presumption that the failed attempt will receive adequate punishment after death. In Persia, the failed suicide will presumably get another chance.

Protestants find it a shocking sign that a suicidal person doesn't have an adequate fear of death, which is why a suicide attempt is treated as evidence of a mental illness. Out of this, we have many suicide hotlines to talk people out of their intention to do away with themselves.

We also have a ferocious taboo against discussing the subject. No school in America, no college or university offers even a modicum of information about other societies' views on suicide. There are no courses on its history or its sociology. It is such a taboo precisely because it violates two of our core myths.

Our third myth, that groups are bad, embodies two subsidiary sentiments. One is the anti-authority sentiment embedded in our religion of Protestantism; the second is that badness is more apt to spring from a group than from an individual, and the more cohesive the group, the greater the potential for evil.

This third myth is most explicit in our Constitution, beginning with the separation of powers of the federal government into three co-equal branches. The reason expressed at the Constitutional Convention two centuries ago in Philadelphia was that a divided government would be less cohesive, which could only benefit individual members of society. While it could be argued that the Constitution contains this fundamental distrust because of the new nation's experience with King George and England, that is not the case. That same distrust can be found in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, published 100 years earlier, and even in the Magna Carta, which predated the Constitution by 600 years.

Secondly, the Constitution designed the national legislature to make it a partially representative body with staggered terms of office in order to keep "factions" — what we today would call "special interest groups" — from joining together into larger groups, thereby becoming more powerful.

Thirdly, the Bill of Rights was added to enfeeble the central government in its relations with the states and to support the triumphant individual.

The myth that big groups are bad and need to be fragmented to diminish their harmful potential shows up everywhere in our culture. The lone warrior of the Rambo movies fights organized armies, the rag tag individuals of "Star Wars" battle against evil forces of organization and multitudes. Ronald Reagan won the presidency based on a campaign against the bloated federal government of the United States and the "evil empire" of the Soviet Union.

Again, ours is not a universal human view. In other cultures, strong benign leaders are adored, strong centralized government is a social ideal, and in many parts of the world, aristocratic power is a religiously-based social good.

In contrast, our predominant religious tradition — our Protestantism — offers a theological foundation to our antagonism towards group power. It differs from other forms of Christianity in its teaching that divine communication is democratically accessible to everyone. Some get it by reading the Bible, others by what they call the Spirit, still others by prayer. But most importantly, there is no hierarchy of powerful organized religious authority above the individual.

This rejection of authority, particularly a powerful religious authority, is what brought Protestant religious followers to this country. It is what defined their church structures, which range from Baptists, where each church is organized around a charismatic preacher, to Anglicans, where bishops assign priests to their churches. Between these two are the broad range of mainstream democratic religious institutions, formed into Presbyterian synods, Methodist annual conferences, and Unitarian local congregations.

In sum, the Protestantism underlying our history, our culture and our government is the force that wraps up in one bundle our triumphant individualism and our anti-authority, anti-group mythologies. Indeed, those myths are reinforced by the First Amendment which forbids a single national church.

In the past we have not had a single event that put all three of our core myths together. It is ironic that the Jonestown suicides, destroying a community which began as a Protestant denomination, may now qualify.

Jonestown is the story of people who relinquished their individual identity to a single, strong leader, and of that leader, who led them to a jungle in another land, and ordered them to kill themselves. As it becomes myth, the story will be proof that authority, particularly religious authority, is dangerous to individuals, and can lead to the worst possible outcome: suicide.

What is the evidence that Jonestown will fill this mythical niche?

Three big stories — other than Jim Jones — that captured the headlines during the 1970s were Charles Manson, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and Synanon. Charles Manson proved to the country that a strong charismatic leader could induce a group of people to commit gruesome homicides, the SLA that a group of fanatic radicals could kidnap a rich girl like Patty Hearst and brainwash her into committing bank robbery, and Synanon that a drug rehabilitation zealot could persuade his followers to put a rattlesnake in a mailbox to frighten his opponents.

Two of these three events of the 1970s were precursors to Jonestown, and embodied many of the same mythic elements. The Tate-LaBianca killings by Manson's followers gave birth to the word "cult" into the vocabulary of the popular media. By the time of Jonestown, the word was used six times as often in the press as it had been at the beginning of the decade, according to the Canadian Trend Report, which monitors media reports for changes in subject matter.

In addition, according to the Canadian Trend Report, the tendency during the 1980s has been to spice up the term with the adjective "satanic," to leave no doubt about the danger of these groups. Indeed, the word "cult" has become as familiar to the public as it has been misused by the media.

The interjection of these words upon our national psyche has already had dramatic effects on our social actions. In 1987, *The Village Voice* published an article reviewing the number of "satanic cult" members being tried in the courts around the U.S. Debbie Nathan, the author of "The Making of a Modern Witch Trial," found dozens of instances. Most cult members, tried on charges of child abuse, were found guilty despite very little physical evidence presented during trial. As part of this prosecution, many police departments now have their own experts on satanic cults, and a number of professionals certified as authorities on the subject ply their wares in courtrooms around the country. The response to protect this plethora of innocent scapegoats of the post-Jonestown hysteria took form as VOCAL, or Victims of Child Abuse Laws. The organization now has thousands of members, and spends much of its time defending individuals accused of satanic cult activity.

One post-Jonestown victim was Rajneesh and his town of Purim in Oregon. Rashneesh followers were viewed as a suspicious cult and

were slowly backed into a political corner by their neighbors and state agencies. While the thousands of followers committed no public crimes, the constant allusions to Jonestown soon forced the organization to close its operations. In the end, some of the group's top management pleaded guilty to a set of minor charges, and the guru was driven out of the country by the Immigration Service.

There are probably large, but uncounted, numbers of innocent people accused of crimes growing out of our fear of satanic cults. There may be other communities like Rashneesh, destroyed by accusation and comparisons to Jonestown in the local media, that the rest of the country is unaware of.

This cult hysteria is not evident in other countries. Thus, this will someday be recognized as a distinctively American phenomenon, an outgrowth to our reaction to Jonestown and the evolving anti-cult syndrome.

As Jonestown becomes the embodiment of satanic cults, so Jim Jones is becoming the newest figure in American mythology. As his demonic stature grows, the characteristics that separated him from American society — he would say "alienated" — will dwindle into insignificance.

With black hair and dark complexion, Jim often denied his white heritage, preferring to identify himself alternately with Native Americans and blacks. When I knew him in the mid-1970s, I frequently heard him say that he was a "black brother." Because of his destiny to play such an important mythological role, though, his claim to black origins will rapidly fade from popular memory. In other words, Jim, as well as his congregation, is getting whiter as time goes on, which lets more and more whites identify with the myth. The historic facts will not fit the American myth perfectly, as America has only a nominal, and guilty, interest in black people. But time will accommodate: his distinction from the prototype mythic figure will fade and grow more ambiguous, until finally, there will be no difference at all. In the end, he will be the embodiment — the white, Nordic, Protestant embodiment — of evil.

The changes are already occurring. In a recent personal survey of 25 people, including several blacks, in San Francisco, everyone agreed that Jim Jones was white. The percentage of the Temple estimated to be black was 70%, down 18% from the published figures at the time of the deaths.

Thus, Jim Jones and Jonestown created a story that fits in perfectly with the mythology of America: that a cohesive group with a

strong leader is dangerous, because it can destroy its individual members. This myth is particularly suited to the suppression of religious groups.

Jonestown has given the word "cult" a new and terrifying meaning. The reigning national hysteria over these groups will remain Jonestown's enduring legacy.

Exemplary Dualism and Authoritarianism at Jonestown

Constance A. Jones

The tragedy at Jonestown, Guyana was the culmination of authoritarian practices in a civil religion sect which adopted exemplary dualism as its basis. Peoples Temple, a communal movement with civil religion themes, advocated total withdrawal from normal social involvements and participation in a self-styled utopian community. The civil religion of Peoples Temple provided a basis for illegitimate authority through exemplary dualism, the belief which defined Jim Jones and his "cause" as exemplars of absolute good and opponents, variously identified at different times, as exemplars of absolute evil. Polarization through exemplary dualism led to a contrast identity which defined the Temple as the antithesis of absolute evil — American capitalist, racist society — and engendered a policy of social isolation which branded normal participation in the processes of the larger society as undesirable. Reinforcement of cognitive polarization and social isolation provided a milieu for authoritarian submission and proved decisive in prohibiting intervention into the illegitimate authoritarianism of the community. Understanding the causes of and the conditions in the Jonestown tragedy comes from awareness of the power and effects of the exemplary dualism enforced by Jones.

Peoples Temple as Civil Religion

Historically, a well-defined "plausibility structure" (Berger, 1967) has buttressed American institutions and their concomitant defi-

nitions of reality. At the core of this belief system is traditional civil religion, a combination of biblical religion and utilitarian individualism which includes the "notion of Americans as an elect people with exemplary significance for the world" (Bellah and Hammond, 1980: 169). Since the sixties, however, "transitions in world order" (Wuthnow, 1978) and domestic social change have seriously challenged these beliefs. As Americans have re-evaluated the moral bases of political and economic activities in light of this challenge, we have seen nothing less than "the erosion of the legitimacy of the American way of life" (Bellah and Hammond, 1980: 176).

In response to this crisis of legitimation, several religious alternatives emerged. Some new religious movements have taken decidedly apolitical stances, as in most of the Oriental movements. Others, such as the Unification Church and the Moral Majority, have sought a reinstatement of traditional civil religion with more absolutist doctrine. Peoples Temple, a movement which rejected the traditional civil religion of America, especially its utilitarian individualism, favored a combination of socialist ideology and biblical religion. In its justification of political and economic action in religious terms, Peoples Temple constitutes a civil religion sect.

In contrast to the Unification Church's reformist civil religion (Anthony and Robbins, 1978), the civil religion of Peoples Temple was revolutionary. Recognizing the failure of traditional, implicit civil religion, the movement sought to replace it with an opposing ethic of socialism in which socialism and capitalism are representatives of a Manichean (i.e., radical or absolute) dualism. The creed of Peoples Temple legitimated political and economic action in the religious language of moral absolutism. As agent of absolute good set against the exemplar of absolute evil (capitalist, racist America), the Temple was beyond self-criticism and self-reform. The probability of totalitarianism and illegitimate authority grows easily in this context; it grew rapidly through the directives of Jim Jones.[1]

Manichean Dualism of Peoples Temple

While the belief systems of many new religious movements tend to interpret problems and provide solutions to these problems in individualistic ways, Jim Jones began in the mid-1950s building a church around the social ideals of racial integration and communalism

(Richardson, 1979; Hall, 1979). Because of his rejection of radical inequality and fascist institutions in American society, Jones became an ardent socialist early in his career. The two themes of racial equality and socialism remained the hallmarks of Jones' rhetoric as they were interwoven into Christian and atheistic patterns as circumstances demanded.

Though Jones undoubtedly began his movement with a theological base including traditional Christian themes, he soon began to use theology in the service of his socialist goals:

> "We're ecumenical. We don't have property. We believe
> God is love, and love is socialism. We cannot love unless
> there's equality. The highest worship to God is to serve
> fellow human beings."(Reston, 1981: 136)

By using biblical imagery, prophetical claims, and self-aggrandizement, Jones expounded a sort of "Christian atheism" in which the divine is embodied in the social goals of justice and human service with himself as the agent of its incarnation. He played upon messianic themes by claiming that Jesus taught socialism and that his own (Jones') coming was also foretold in Isaiah. By emphasizing the conceits of modern Christianity, Jones argued that religion alone is insufficient for salvation; redemption requires revolutionary social action. (Reston, 1981: 54-56, 190-191).

According to Jones, Peoples Temple had a special spiritual destiny in creating a socialist communal society out of debased American remnants. Capitalism and racism were so pervasive in America that only a revolutionary isolationist movement could be separated enough from the defiling American scene to effect true freedom. Peoples Temple was motivated as much by this separation from the evils of America as by its implementation of socialist ends. In separation Jones sought "legitimation by contrast," a dimension of Manichean thought which specifies an absolute contrast between moral exemplars (Anthony and Robbins, 1978). Jones himself and his socialist movement claimed synonymity with the moral absolutes of justice, equality and freedom. Good and bad people, good and bad actions, good and bad beliefs were in the last analysis defined by the only absolute arbiter of evaluation — Jones himself.

Jones drew on two of the most powerful eschatological myths of the West — Christianity and Marxism. In each he found Manichean

scripts which emphasized the redemptive roles to be played by the Just (the "elect," the "proletariat"). Jones claimed exemplary status for the movement as the "innocent" whose suffering would change the world; through persecution, and eventually suicide, the Temple would not opt *out* of history, but play a part *in* history. In addition to these utopian, eschatological, and sacrificial elements, Jones appropriated prophetic and soteriological themes from both Judeo-Christian theology and Marxist ideology. In his description of the final struggle between Good and Evil as an apocalypse, Jones reinforced a Manichean worldview by appealing to and identifying with several well-known oppositions — socialist and capitalist, Christ and antichrist, proletariat and bourgeoisie.

Of course Jones was unfaithful to both Marxism and Christianity, using elements of either or both when his own ends could be furthered. His messianism betrayed the proletarian spirit. His personal substitution for God was atheistic at its core. Yet, Jones used these contradictions and ambiguities to manipulate the meaning systems and self concepts of members so suasively that challenge from within the Temple was minimized. He was masterful in using religious rhetoric to appeal to older black Christians while using political rhetoric to appeal to young social activists.

With elements of socialism, messianism, and biblical prophesy, Jones crafted a worldview which made an impending apocalypse plausible. He used biblical imagery to persuade his followers that they were on a divine pilgrimage through a wasteland to paradise. Themes of destruction, redemption, flight and salvation taken from the book of Isaiah were used to justify a prophecy of destruction of the fattened nations and escape of the righteous into a new nation (Reston, 1981: 140). The United States, its institutions, and even its standards of beauty were portrayed as the "beast" — totally irredeemable — to be overcome by the "redeeming remnant." Well-versed in both doctrinal and operational aspects of the conflict of opposing forces of absolute good and evil, members of Peoples Temple were prepared for sacrifice, struggle and an apocalyptic "final showdown."

The chauvinistic absolutism of Jones and his followers is at variance with traditional American civil religion, which has at its best contained elements of self-criticism and reform (Bellah, 1975). In the process of continually contrasting actual and ideal states, traditional civil religion has enforced reform when authority threatened to become

illegitimate. With Jones, however, this contrast between actual and ideal was transformed into an absolute contrast between his movement and the rest of the world. As political chauvinists have used civil religion themes to ensure uncritical commitment to the nation, so Jones used his revolutionary rhetoric to assure his followers that there could be no compromise with, no going back to, the society from which they came. As the antithesis of absolute evil — American capitalist, racist society — Peoples Temple embodied absolute good.

Traditional American civil religion has also included a belief that, in individuals as well as nations, moral ambiguity fosters societal reform according to ethical principles (Anthony and Robbins, 1978: 90). With Jones, this ambiguity and any consequent prospect of self-criticism were obliterated. Jones became the first and last judge of persons and actions, often defining as good actions which blatantly contradict traditional civil morality. As exemplar of absolute good, Jones demanded that families be broken up, that sexual activities be directed by a "relationship committee," and that parents declare their willingness to sacrifice their children's lives for the cause.

Needless to say, Jones did not define values in terms of universal moral principles, but rather as a function of his judgment. The end of revolution came to justify a collection of often contradictory means and Jones seemed to be the sole logician who could connect ends and means. Through a series of techniques Jones gained total control over the dissemination of information to his followers, thereby consolidating his absolute claim to authority. Progressive withdrawal from the larger society, strict control over dissension, and cultivation of a paternal image reinforced by the labels "Father" and "Dad" combined to reinforce Jones' authoritarian control over his followers and to support the rumors that he was Christ or Lenin reincarnated.

As social isolation increased and Jones became the exclusive source of authority — beyond all beliefs and principles — he projected all evil onto the "outside world," and thereby completed the structure of Manichean dualism. Not only was he the embodiment of absolute good, but he alone could provide for the security of his followers. His tight control over access to media, social interaction among members, and other means to self-reflection assured that his dualistic world view stood unchallenged.

Contrast Identity

Erik Erikson (1968) describes a psychological syndrome of adolescence labeled "negative identity" in which a "scornful and snobbish hostility" is demonstrated toward roles offered as proper by the larger society. A development of this concept is the notion of "contrast identity" in which individuals who have negative identities perceive that they are virtuous because they are "against" the larger society which is corrupt.

Peoples Temple exemplified contrast identity at both social and personal levels. As the movement became more isolated from American society, it ironically became more dependent upon American values and institutions for its self-definition — an identity derived from contrast. Jones became more vehement in his rejection of the American system and his identification with any cause which could be defined as "un-American" or "anti-American." He expended great effort in establishing and reinforcing the plausibility of this identity, primarily through socialization of his followers and denying mainstream American society any scrutiny of the movement. He was astute in this strategy, for, if the contrast identity were no longer plausible, then the movement would be judged by the values of the larger society. Having broken a number of very stringent societal norms, Temple members would be left with self-definitions as deviants and the movement would be defined as disreputable or worse, "evil."

The contrast identity fostered by Jones' Manichean dualism included the absolute differentiation of "them" and "us," the projection of evil onto "them" and an intense fear of this projection — paranoia. Jones was responsible for a variety of identity reinforcement techniques — revolutionary suicide, control of sexual relations, catharsis sessions, and identification with martyrs such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Through these measures he effected belief in the separateness of the movement and conviction that this separation could never be overcome. The possibility of establishing and nourishing another ameliorative identity among Temple members was precluded.

Two of the most effective techniques reinforcing contrast identity proved to be revolutionary sex and revolutionary suicide. Jones encouraged revolutionary sex to "make people more dedicated socialists" and justified it by biblical reference to the teachings of Paul. Revolutionary sex included heterosexual and homosexual encounters with Jones himself and between non-married partners who were speci-

fied by Jones or approved by the "relationship committee." In addition, female Temple members, assigned by Jones, had sexual encounters with Guyanese government officials. According to Larry Layton whose wife was appropriated by Jones as a mistress, Jones used sex "to keep people from committing treason," to make members "more dedicated socialists," and to demonstrate that "romantic love is a delusion" (Reston, 1981:243).

Revolutionary sex was accompanied by training for another antinomian practice at Jonestown — revolutionary suicide. Jones adapted the practice from Huey Newton, who defined the original concept as a positive act which arises from self-assertion and a rejection of defeat. As such, Newton's revolutionary suicide is not sought-after martyrdom, born of despondency, but rather a conscious willingness to die for the principles of revolution. Jones' adaptation of the concept, though termed "dying for a cause," was much more fatalistic, referring to collective suicide as a logical and desirable response to imminent defeat at the hands of conspirators.

As Hall (1981: 188) points out, "mass suicide bridged the divergent public threads of meaningful existence at Jonestown — those of political revolution and religious salvation." As was often the case, Jones transferred the aura of religious sacrifice to political action by using biblical references to justify his apocalyptic vision:

> "That's what Jesus said. No man, no man will take my life...I will lay it down...lay it down when I get ready. Some Christians don't understand us because we're more Christian than they will ever be...And Paul said that it's all right to give your body to be buried...but be sure you've got charity in your heart. Charity means Principle. What is pure love? Communism...In other words, Paul was saying give your body to be burned. Set it afire, if necessary; to convey a revolutionary message, but be sure you've got Communism in your heart" (Reston, 1981:268).

In Guyana, as Jones became more threatened by the Concerned Relatives group, his rhetoric portrayed this organization as a condensed version of all personified evil and, as such, the cause of impending apocalypse. Jones' depiction of the group as a sordid assemblage of blackmailers, terrorists, child molesters, racists, and *agents provo-*

cateurs of various types reinforced motifs of contrast and conflict between the Temple's cause and the movement posed by the relatives. Through continuous speeches and rehearsals for collective suicide, the so-called "white nights," the Guyana community repeatedly engaged in scripted dialogue of exhortation and response:

> "So long as there is the alternative to make a mark, you fight. Remove the enemy's life and then your own. But they may try to set up the melee, to be black against black, us against the black Guyanese soldier, and that fight would dishonor socialism. Then it's best just to lay down our lives...and what's that called, congregation?"
> "REVOLUTIONARY SUICIDE," they replied collectively (Reston, 1981: 270).

Several antinomian practices contributed to the contrast identity of the Temple, but revolutionary suicide remained the quintessence of contrast identity in its ultimate choice of non-existence over existence. In committing themselves to an extreme version of contrast identity, Temple members evolved a particular "Jonestown consciousness" which could only be viable in isolation from the larger normative order. In this way, exemplary dualism, contrast identity, and total dependence upon one source of social definition were of one piece in the Jonestown experience — and became the fabric of Jones' authoritarianism.

Authoritarianism in the "Jonestown Consciousness"

From the testimony of Jonestown members, it appears that they joined Peoples Temple in the U.S. and later went to Guyana because of idealism and hope for positive social change. But in the U.S. and later in Guyana these goals merged into a "Jonestown consciousness," which served to keep members obedient to Jones and fearful of leaving the group. Their obedience and fear were as much a product of the dissolution of the freedom of individual conscience as they were a product of the disappearance of the freedom to leave Jonestown. Rhetoric as well as arms kept members in Jonestown.

The survivor who led a group of eleven to freedom on the morning that Congressman Ryan was shot testifies to the difficulty he had in

persuading members to risk escape.[2] Most of the members, he claims, were convinced that, despite the insufferable conditions of Jonestown, Jones would eventually make the experiment a paradise. They were also convinced of the futility of an escape, since agents outside Jonestown (the Guyanese government, the C.I.A., or the jungle itself) would assure the death or severe punishment of anyone who left. Given the veracity of this account, the question which begs to be answered is how Jonestown members came to accept a worldview and a social order in which they were accomplices in their own imprisonment. Response to this question requires a theoretical framework which goes beyond physical coercion to explain the complex social psychological processes operative at Jonestown.

The seminal work on "authoritarian personality" by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford identifies several components of "authoritarianism" which constitute a "general disposition to glorify, to be subservient to and to remain uncritical toward authoritative figures of the ingroup and to take an attitude of punishing outgroup figures in the name of some moral authority" (Adorno et al., 1950: 228). This study measured susceptibility to prefascist propaganda using the theoretical perspective of personality psychology and numerous psychological inventories, a task we cannot duplicate in the Jonestown situation. Nevertheless, the dimensions of authoritarianism set out in *The Authoritarian Personality* are particularly demonstrable in the social psychological profile of Jonestown members.

There *was* a tendency among members to glorify Jones, to forfeit their freedom to him, and to justify his non-normative behavior through their faith in his superhuman abilities. Members were also encouraged to belittle outgroups as morally inferior and therefore incapable of understanding the Temple's "cause." The following rubrics identify the dimensions of authoritarianism set out by Adorno et al. (1950: 228-241). Following each rubric is a summary of the dimension and application of the dimension to the "Jonestown consciousness."

Conventionalism. As an element in authoritarianism, conventionalism refers to adherence to conventional values on the basis of external social pressure, particularly adherence to the standards of the collective powers with which an individual is identified. Because the conventionalistic individual's conscience is more dependent upon the dictates of an external agency than upon himself, he is capable of exchanging one set of standards for another as the external agency demands. This exchange is then done "in good conscience."

Temple members exhibited this type of conventionalism through their acceptance of Jones' rhetoric. Not only was this rhetoric contradictory more often than not, but it also, in many instances, violated norms which would be commonly considered essential to basic civil morality. Acceptance of Jones' normative code for members and acceptance of the known duplicity of Jones himself point out that the conventional value system of the Temple was a function of adherence to Jones and not adherence to individual conscience. Identification with the idealized portrayal of Jones assured members that their individual judgments were inferior to Jones' judgment and that "matters of individual conscience" did not exist. Conscience became externalized in the figure of the leader.

Authoritarian Submission. Jones demanded and received from members a submissive, uncritical attitude toward an idealized image of himself as moral authority. The idealized image was due in large measure to the monitoring of members' activities by an intelligence-gathering network, the evidence from which Jones used to bolster his claims to clairvoyance, healing, and supernatural strength. By demanding obedience and respect to this persona, looked upon by many as an incarnation of divinity, Jones couched disobedience and rebellion in moralistic terms. Not to obey without question was to contradict an agent of supernatural power.

Jones usurped individual choice and individual conscience by breaking up marriages, setting up sexual liaisons between members, and demanding sexual favors from male and female members who attracted him. In his role as "Father" he usurped the authority of parents over children so that he became the sole parental figure in the Temple, to which both adulation and hostility were directed. But hostility toward Jones and toward his carefully selected ingroup authorities could not be expressed; the unsavory aspects of these figures — unfairness, self-seeking and domination — were displaced onto outgroups, a mechanism by which repressed hostility was handled and authoritarian aggression promoted.

Authoritarian Aggression. An individual who has been denied basic pleasures and forced to submit to a system of rigid restraints, and therefore feels oppressed, is likely to seek a social object who can be blamed for his oppression and to resent others who fare better under the oppression by "getting away with something." If the individual is further prohibited in voicing any criticism of the authority which is the real

cause of his oppression, he will be prone to condemnation and rejection of those who violate the values of accepted authority. Once he is convinced that these people should be punished, he has justified his aggression toward these others under the guise of morality.

Thus, authoritarian aggression is the displacement of hostility originally directed toward ingroup authority onto outgroups or onto members of the ingroup who are not associated with authority. This process is similar to the displacement used in "scapegoating" in which the source of frustration is confused and projected onto others. In authoritarian displacement, however, the source of frustration is clearly ingroup authority, aggression against which cannot be tolerated socially or psychologically. As with scapegoating, the ingroup is considered moral and the outgroup immoral, so that unacceptable impulses within the individual can be projected onto the outgroup.

Jones taught members to emulate his actions of looking for, condemning, and punishing individuals who violated the norms which he dictated. This process was in effect between members and non-members, children and parents, as well as members and members, but never between members and individuals in authority, and certainly not Jones himself. By encouraging betrayal of one member by another, Jones undermined trusting relationships among members and sowed the seeds of suspicion, fear, and aggression within the Temple itself. His further diatribes against the U.S., the C.I.A., and even preservatives in food provided more objects for scorn. Identification of these enemies within and outside Jonestown destroyed any security which was not dependent upon Jones himself and defined a worldview based on fear and resentment.

The processes of conventionalism, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression combined to effect a worldview which was totally dependent on Jones' whims. As members accepted the constant changes in Jones' requirements for standards of conduct and belief, the possibility of control over and expression of individual conscience lessened. This externalization of conscience assured that Jones' authority would remain virtually unchecked within the Temple.

Anti-intraception. When one avoids reflection upon subjective conditions, especially feelings, in favor of concentration on objective and external conditions, one is anti-intraceptive. This syndrome is compatible with projection, in that both processes prohibit examination of inner conflict and common human problems. In extreme anti-intraception,

lack of concern for subjective development is associated with a general devaluation of the human condition and human beings themselves; individuals are viewed as objects to be manipulated.

Members of Peoples Temple were never rewarded for independent thought or for personal reflections which did not agree with Jones' rhetoric. Jones claimed repeatedly that he, as their "Father," could see to the welfare of members better than they themselves could. Constant rehearsals of unified responses were designed to assure that individuals did not reflect on their personal hardships or their identities as individuals, but rather on their membership in the "cause." We know from research on collective behavior that individuals who reflect upon themselves as responsible actors rather than as anonymous parts of social aggregates are poor candidates for irrational manipulation and control. Using this principle of social control Jones reinforced anti-intraception by systematically denying opportunities for subjective personality development, which would have served to ameliorate the severity of his authoritarian control.

Superstition and Stereotypy. Temple members were led by Jones into a deterministic, fatalistic, and cynical worldview which included a refusal to perceive history as creative and individual choice as consequential. Jones' claims to the supernatural powers of clairvoyance, healing, and extraordinary endurance fostered superstition. Even those who knew of faked healings were convinced of Jones' miraculous powers through other demonstrations. He was a mystery; he knew (through his intelligence network) what no other human could know and he could heal (through fakery) when all other hopes were exhausted. Jones' "mysterious powers" were augmented by his censorship of all information which reached Jonestown. There was no alternative but to believe what "Dad" said about the *provocateurs* in the C.I.A. and the Concerned Relatives group. Themes of paranoia, fear, and betrayal were common fare and who could doubt their authenticity when, for Jonestown, Jones was the sole disseminator of world news?

In the end, members saw themselves as *compelled* by destiny to commit mass suicide. Protests (which the tapes of those last moments prove to be extremely few) were brushed aside by Jones with the words, "It's too late. It's too late, my children." Revolutionary suicide became plausible in this paranoid worldview in which betrayal had forced the hand of Fate into producing the inevitable — apocalypse. Fate also operated beyond the social level; at the individual level, it was Fate that told Larry Layton to kill Congressman Ryan.

Superstition was inevitable given the stereotypic depictions of friends and enemies alike. Jones portrayed Russia as a "socialist friend" and America, with religious allusion, as the "beast." The "beast" was loathed by Jones because it had rejected him and his "cause." Yet he was curiously bound to America in his beliefs and actions; he wanted to teach America something about itself, a lesson summarized in Jones' last reference to Fate, "It's all over, all over. What a legacy! What a legacy!" (Reston, 1981:326).

Power and "Toughness". According to Adorno et al., authoritarianism includes a phenomenon described as a "power complex" in which there is an over-emphasis on the power motif in human relationships so that relations among people are viewed as strong-weak or dominant-submissive. This complex contains contradictory elements; at times individuals admire the power possessed by others and are inclined to submit to it, while, at other times, these same individuals are afraid of the weakness implied in submission and strive to possess power themselves. These contradictory elements are most often combined in an identification with power and authority figures, by which the need for power is met vicariously and the fear of power is assuaged by submission. Curiously this process transforms submission to power into participation in power.

It is clear that Jones touted his personal, charismatic power over individuals as well as his authority. Statements by members reveal that one of the strongest reasons for their commitment to the Temple was the power which Jones displayed over his followers and over prestigious non-members. It was a common belief among members that Jones could produce whatever he desired, regardless of difficulty. He faked calls from the President of the United States in front of members; he produced food, shelter, bail, and legal counsel on demand; he was recognized by municipal and national leaders as a great humanitarian; and of course he could heal and demonstrate clairvoyance.

At times he claimed nothing short of omnipotence, but at other times he implored his followers not to "hurt" him so severely. He claimed that his powers were extended to his flock selflessly only to be met in return by betrayal. With this ploy he engaged his followers as accomplices in the maintenance of his power, thereby granting them identification with him and the vicarious enjoyment of power. For members to mistrust Jones or to see his authority as illegitimate was to condemn themselves.

Destructiveness and Cynicism. Because an authoritarian situ-

ation imposes numerous external restrictions upon the satisfaction of one's needs, an individual can be expected to harbor strong aggressive urges. This hostility can be displaced onto specific outgroups through authoritarian aggression or generalized in a devaluation of human beings, including oneself. Both of these processes were demonstrated by Temple members and Jones himself.

Jones' cynicism about human nature is well-documented; he stated repeatedly that everyone, including his beloved followers, had betrayed him and, through him, the international cause of socialism. In order to instill the same cynicism in followers, Jones used the ploy of self-contempt as part of the conversion process and later as a standard tactic of manipulation. In July 1978 he proclaimed to a Peoples Temple rally:

> Relate your own faults...Say that no matter what weak-
> ness there is in me, I will stick. I will go through. I will
> never turn back. It's not enough simply to look into
> yourself, but you must correct your weakness. You must
> feel sickened at your elitist attitudes. I want to see that
> searching inside of you, because I want you to be saved.
> I love you by asking this. Pour out yourself in the deepest
> analytical way about the worst things you see in your-
> self. I love you (Reston, 1981: 82).

At one point Jones ordered members to write him "self-analysis" letters in which they were to delineate whatever negative impulses they felt and to examine their sexual appetites, particularly as they related to him. "Dear Dad" letters found strewn around Jones' house in Jonestown testify to members' attempts at self-vilification as they confessed all manner of "deviance": sexual aberration, capitalist elitism, weakness in the face of death, and lapses of faith.

The letters exemplified destructiveness in that they were recitations of utter worthlessness, unused capabilities, and unmet opportunities. But, more importantly, if the individuals who wrote them had any sense whatever of self-appreciation, then the letters themselves were the epitome of cynicism — self-analysis on demand with perfunctory debasement, commissioned and even scripted by Jones himself.

Other rituals of vilification were town forums and "white nights" in which Jones would recount the failings of members and they would be obliged to recant. In these sessions Jones would tear asunder the common supports of individual identity and replace them with his

non-traditional values. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness, faithfulness and heresy were re-defined to conform to Jones' doctrine of exemplary dualism — the *sine qua non* of "Jonestown consciousness."

Projectivity. As we have seen, suppressed impulses of the authoritarian individual are projected onto other people or outgroups who are then rejected on the basis of this attribution. Logically then we may expect to identify some of these repressed impulses by examining the attributes most readily ascribed to others. With Jones this is an easy matter; his perceptions are well documented. He was preoccupied with "evil forces" in the world, including erotic excesses, plots and conspiracies. We assume that his own unconscious urges were dominated by destructiveness and sexuality.

But in the case of members, the data are not so easily interpreted. There is evidence that some individuals, the leader of the escape for one, came to define Jonestown as worse than whatever fate would be encountered outside. Others, perhaps most, accepted a fearful, paranoid worldview in which every agency outside Jonestown, even nature itself, would conspire to destroy a defector's life. We assume that, to the degree that Jones' rhetoric of paranoia, conspiracy, and betrayal was accepted by followers, projection contributed to the creation and maintenance of the worldview upon which "Jonestown consciousness" rested.

Vilification of outgroups was not the only manifestation of projection. There were also opportunities for projection within the Temple itself through public censure and punishment of "deviants" at public forums and "white nights." Several corporeal punishments were institutionalized for adults and children alike. As identification of the untrustworthy became more and more the responsibility of each member, the opportunity for a variety of projective schemes became possible.

The salience of the process of projection itself, independent of any identification of the "other," is demonstrated in Jones' own words. He often screamed, "They're out there! They're out there every night!" as though a definition of "they" was superfluous.

Sex. According to Adorno et al., one of the strongest repressed impulses in the authoritarian character is sex. As identification with ingroup authority is established, an individual represses his own sexual impulses and projects them onto others, thereby developing an exaggerated concern for sexual "goings on" and a punitive attitude toward violations of sexual mores.

Sex was clearly significant for Jones. As the "maestro of revolutionary sex," he touted his own prowess with men and women alike.

Some of his affairs, he claimed, were humiliating and unsavory, but were performed for the good of the revolution. He appropriated several mistresses, in fact a coterie of young white women, who were acknowledged as such by Temple members. In most cases Jones used sex to manipulate members and to test their loyalty to him.

Jones' demands of members varied. From most he required conventional sexual behavior, verbally assaulting deviants in public with detailed descriptions of their pursuits. From males and females who attracted him, he required personal liaisons. On occasion, as he saw a need, he paired sexual partners himself or commissioned the "relationship committee" to pair them. And lastly, he used a small group of attractive women for "revolutionary sex" outside the Temple, to gain political favors.

We assume that Jones' use of members' sexuality created a great deal of repression within them. His tactics were extreme and in all cases served to destroy any personal relationships which were the products of individual choice. He systematically destroyed stable sexual bonds by dissolving marriages, flaunting his escapades with one or both members of a pair, and introducing the specter of homosexuality into heterosexual relationships. These practices, the institutionalization of sex segregation and the creation of a "relationship committee," granted Jones almost total control over sexual expression in Jonestown. In addition, there are two recorded instances of extemporaneous violence against sexual offenders; these outbursts indicate a punitive attitude toward individuals who "got away with something."

Authoritarian dimensions were integral to the "Jonestown consciousness." Building upon the ideals of members, Jones embellished these to form a Manichean contrast/conflict model of reality which promoted conventionalism and glorification of his cause. Because of the exemplary nature of the cause and the synonymity of Jones and the cause, submission to Jones' authority became identified with moral obedience. As greater and greater demands were made upon them, members justified their compliance using a moralistic vocabulary and worldview through which their misery was given meaning. However meaningful, the oppression of members generated frustration and aggression which could not be consciously directed toward Jonestown authority. Repressed hostility was handled through authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, projection and anti-intraception. The reflexiveness necessary for internal reform was obliterated and exemplars of absolute good and absolute evil were stereotyped

and polarized in conflict, laying the groundwork for superstition and cynicism. An apocalyptic vision of a "final showdown" was a logical *denouement* of such a scenario.

Analysis

Exemplary dualism and its products, contrast identity and psychological dimensions of authoritarian character, determined the social and psychological milieu of Jonestown. These factors offer insight into why commitment to Jones continued after freedom became oppression and humanitarianism became degradation. But this insight is not free of problems. The theory which explains the "authoritarian personality" and its dimensions postulates that lack of ego-strength causes susceptibility to authoritarian control. This deficiency, the theory points out, is reflected in a host of defense mechanisms, each involving repression of impulses. But we cannot use such an approach from depth psychology without access to the conscious and unconscious motivations of members. We have limited data, none of which is suitable for such analysis.

But we do have a significant body of testimonials by members and ex-members whose associations span the life of the Temple. In these accounts, persuasive evidence for the existence of most if not all of the dimensions of the authoritarian character is apparent. Whether these dimensions are the product of early socialization, as hypothesized by Adorno et al., or the result of social learning within the Temple we cannot say. What we can say with assurance is that the conditions at Jonestown were optimal for fostering any susceptibility to fascist control, whether psychodynamically induced or not.

A satisfactory theory explaining compliance with Jones' authoritarianism would include motivation toward, opportunity for, and reinforcement of submission to Jones. Opportunity and reinforcement are evident from what we know about Temple practices. Motivation is another matter. If we accept the "authoritarian personality" theory, then those individuals who exhibited projection, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression possessed a personality trait called "susceptibility to pre-fascist propaganda." According to this theory, there is a more-or-less permanent psychological motivation toward submission to authority, a trait which directs individuals toward opportunities and reinforcements which are consonant with, and satisfy to

some degree, this motivation. If this were the case, then members would have been selected for this trait, because individuals without this trait would have found no reinforcement within the Temple and would have defected or rebelled against Jones' authoritarianism at every opportunity. While the data to test this theory do not exist, we offer it as a plausible explanation of susceptibility to Jones' authoritarianism.

Another explanation which relies less heavily on fixed psychological motivation for its explanatory power but rather focuses on the interaction of motivation, opportunity, and reinforcement is likely. A basic idealism and motivation for social reform prompted Temple members, without any hope of personal aggrandizement, to follow Jones to Guyana. This move represented immediate sacrifice (leaving loved ones, property, and whatever security there is in knowing one's situation in life) in the hope of a future reward (communal utopia). Such an act of obedience is understandable, given the charismatic power of Jones and the propaganda he disseminated about Guyana. For those motivated to comply with authority, Jones provided opportunity and reinforcement. For those in whom motivation for compliance was weak, Jones used control over opportunities and selective reinforcement to alter original motivation. For those who entered the Temple with a diffuse ideal of "doing good in the world," Jones provided a systematic worldview which enhanced these proclivities and gave them international and eternal significance. For those who already possessed a desire for monumental social action, Jones provided a means and a structure which he guaranteed would be effective at the global level.

Jones drew upon existing motivations and embellished these. Through a worldview based on exemplary dualism he linked humanitarian goals and group action. Through social isolation and control of reinforcements, he established a closed community in which dimensions of the authoritarian character became functional, even adaptive. In the process, Jones transferred the aura of legitimacy from goals of social action to himself. He became the personification of God, communism, socialism, and freedom. In a curious way, Jones himself became the goal of Jonestown. Obedience to Jones was equated with moral action. Reinforcement of the belief in exemplary dualism functioned to change individual motivation from humanitarianism to authoritarian submission.

Conclusion

The system of authoritarian submission and control at Jonestown is not adequately explained by reductionistic theories which rely solely on psychological, psychodynamic, or behavioristic principles. Clearer explanation lies in the interaction of these principles. Cognitive polarization, personality dynamics, and identity change were all operative at Jonestown. But they were also embedded in a social organization which included specific reinforcements for individual adaptation toward authoritarian submission. The interaction of social and psychological processes and social organization at Jonestown demonstrates that the power of authoritarian control is not only external to individuals, but comes to be integral to their identities and adaptation.

For this reason, the brainwashing thesis is not applicable to Jonestown. Members were not unwillingly made to submit to Jones. According to their worldview based on exemplary dualism, submission was moral, even redemptive. Similarly, the simplistic notion that Jones' personal charisma alone was responsible for members' obedience is an inadequate explanation. Jones' influence, however great, was augmented by a social structure and system of reinforcements which evoked voluntary compliance, to a greater degree than Jones alone could produce.

Jonestown occurred, not because of external control alone, but also because individuals cooperated in their own oppression. A complex process, this cooperation involved the construction of individual motivation and social reinforcement around belief in exemplary dualism. This phenomenon is not unique to Jonestown. Contemporary and historical movements, religious and political, have adopted exemplary dualism as the basis for their worldviews. All adaptations of this system have not resulted in a Jonestown, but all, inevitably, have created an environment in which authoritarian submission breeds.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Dick Anthony for access to his files containing interviews with Peoples Temple members.

2. This paraphrase is taken from a confidential statement by the leader of an escape of eleven Jonestown members on November 18, 1978, given to a seminar on "Authoritarianism in New Religious Movements," San Francisco, January 15, 1981.

References

Adorno, T.W., Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford. 1950. *The Authoritarian Personalit*. Norton.

Anthony, Dick and Thomas Robbins. 1978. "The Effect of Detente on the Growth of New Religions: Reverend Moon and the Unification Church." In Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.), *Understanding the New Religions*. Seabury.

Bell, Daniel. 1976. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Basic Books.

Bellah, Robert N. 1975. *The Broken Covenant*. Seabury.

Bellah, Robert N. and Phillip E. Hammond. 1980. *Varieties of Civil Religion*. Harper & Row.

Berger, Peter L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy*. Doubleday.

Erickson, Erik H. 1968. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*. W.W. Norton.

Hall, John R. 1981 "The Apocalypse at Jonestown." In Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony (eds.), *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*. Transaction Books.

Newton, Huey P. 1973. *Revolutionary Suicide*. Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich.

Reston, James, Jr. 1981. *Our Father Who Art in Hell*. New York Times Books.

Richardson, James T. "Peoples Temple and Jonestown: A Corrective Comparison and Critique." Plenary address presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, San Antonio, Texas, 1979.

Weber, Max. 1964. *The Sociology of Religion*. Beacon.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1978. "Religious Movements and the Transition in
    World Order." In Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.),
    Understanding the New Religions. Seabury.

Remembrance, Identification and Tragedy: Jonestown, The Mirror

John V Moore

It is the tenth year after Jonestown. My wife was recently called for jury duty and was the second person seated in the jury box. When the session resumed following the luncheon recess, the judge asked, "Is there anyone in this courtroom whose daughters died in the Jonestown massacre?" When Barbara raised her hand, he dismissed her.

It was the latest reminder of who we are and what we will forever be: personal witnesses to the most misunderstood cataclysm of our times, keepers of the flame of those who died, arbiters and interpreters of its legacy.

Family gatherings, pictures of our Carolyn, Annie and Kimo — daughters and grandson who died there — children the same age as Kimo, people engaged in the nursing and teaching professions, as our daughters were, all are reminders. A letter from Larry Layton, our former son-in-law who is serving time in prison for his role in the shootings of Congressman Leo Ryan and the Peoples Temple defectors at the Port Kaituma airstrip, stirs other memories. A friend calls to talk with us about her daughter who is away from home for the first time and who has become involved in a church of "true believers." All these reminders have come to us in this tenth year.

It is the way it has been ever since November 18, 1978. From an explosion of publicity following the suicides themselves, the stories in the press dwindled away to one every few days, then every few months, then to the periodic and episodic — and finally to the unexpected and startling — when something connected to Peoples Temple rates a few paragraphs in one of the San Francisco papers. It seems there is always something unresolved, something to bring back the source of the pain:

the controversy about the identification and burial of the bodies, the decision to transfer the unidentified and unclaimed remains to a cemetery in Oakland, the lawsuits and court rulings on the Temple's estate, the murder of three of Jim Jones' critics, the violent deaths of other Temple members, Larry Layton's trials and appeal.

While the rest of the world recalls Jonestown with only a passing, if still prurient interest, there has been no forgetting for those of us whose lives have been bonded together in that tragedy. Although different in some ways, our experiences are similar to others who have lost family or friends through acts of violence. When those we love are murdered or struck down, or suffer and die, we who are left behind know pain and suffering. At the same time, we acknowledge the deaths of strangers only when we identify with something in their lives. The words of the old spiritual express the feeling of those who grieve:

"Is it nothing to you, all ye who pass by?"

*

Sometimes, it is too painful to remember. When the trauma has been shattering, we block the experiences from our minds because remembering involves reliving the experience. By putting the experiences out of mind, we avoid dealing with our feelings of loss, guilt, resentment, anger and blame. Self-justification becomes paramount. It also leads to a dead end.

Shame impedes remembering. Barbara and I met weekly for six months with three young adults who were emerging from intense communal experiences. They responded to an item in a newspaper inviting persons who had left new religious communities to meet with us. Two had been in cults, and the third in a group which had most characteristics of cults. All were burdened with a sense of shame. The media so ridiculed cult members that they concealed their pasts from others. They felt duped by their leaders, and even by their own needs and hopes. In our time together, they found liberation from their bondage to shame.

If we can't live in healthy ways with guilt and shame, they become monkeys on our backs. A stranger wrote us immediately after Jonestown to express her identification with us, and we have continued to correspond over the years. After publication of *The Jonestown Letters* by our surviving daughter, Rebecca Moore, the woman wrote to ask if we were comfortable writing about how we dealt with our loss. It

turned out she was still struggling with the consequences of the tragedy in her own life. She had carried guilt all that time, because she had convinced herself of her own contribution — however small — to that catastrophe.

Obsession with tragedy can become a costly — and sometimes fatal — burden. Apparently, remembering was so painful to Mike Prokes, the Peoples Temple public relations officer who had survived the suicides, that he took his own life six months later.

At the same time, remembering offers the possibility for healing and redemption for those who have suffered, and the possibility of wisdom for those who would learn from the tragedy. During a question-and-answer period following a lecture at the University of California-Davis by German death camp survivor Elie Wiesel, a young woman said, "I remember the Holocaust every day. My grandparents died in the camps. I do not want to forget, ever!" Wiesel replied with kindness and affirmation, "Don't remember the Holocaust every day. It is too terrible to remember every day. Give yourself to your work and the joys of life. You will not forget the Holocaust."

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Our daughter Becky concluded a letter to us early in 1979 by writing, "We will endure, and help others understand." Remembering Jonestown means trying to understand and learn from that event. The point of understanding is not summed up in answers to the question, "Why?", but rather is found in appropriating what we learn from that event for our own lives. Peoples Temple and Jonestown are a mirror for those who are open to discerning something of themselves in the exaggerated reflections.

The most important thing we can learn is that those who died were so much like us. If we understand that, then Jonestown becomes less of a cosmic aberration and more of a quintessentially human event. We can then begin to explore the meaning for us and our society in the deaths of more than 900 North Americans in a South American jungle.

"We need the shelter of truth," Becky wrote in another letter to us. Walls still surround Jonestown, keeping us from understanding.

Ignorance is the first wall. Five or six years after Jonestown, a television news reporter referred to Jonestown as an "armed camp." I wrote to the reporter to remind him that police found only 27 weapons in Jonestown and took three others from three survivors. The reporter

answered that I was correct, but added, "Those guns had been used in the assassination of Congressman Ryan and others at Port Kaituma, and that was the point." I agree: that was precisely the point, not that Jonestown was an armed camp.

I thought of challenging the reporter to find any town or city in the United States, other than a pacifist community, with fewer guns per capita than were found in Jonestown. In the years since Jonestown, several communities have passed ordinances requiring homeowners to keep guns on their property. Even in the peaceful town of 20,000 where we lived 20 years ago, our police chief told me there were 20,000 guns.

Knowledge empowers us to walk through the wall of ignorance.

Similarly, empathy empowers us to walk through walls separating us from others. Only those who can feel with the people of Jonestown will ever gain a sense of the hope and commitment, utopian dreams and adulation, disillusionment, fear and despair which were a part of the lives of those people. There are many points of identification for those who want to understand.

Although remembering is personal, we must not let it become individualistic. Corporate remembering helps the community to integrate an event into common life. The synagogue service for the dead is an ancient community tradition. The church remembers brothers and sisters who have died. Corporate remembering of the Holocaust is essential to human survival. Those who commemorate the anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki keep alive within us, not only the memory of that disaster, but awareness of the risk of greater tragedy in the future. It took almost a generation before Americans could honor those who bore the brunt of the Vietnam War with a national memorial. The creation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday is more than a way of remembering one man, or even the entire civil rights movement. It is the commonwealth remembering the centuries-long struggle of black Americans for liberty, justice and dignity.

*

Elie Wiesel remarked during his lecture, "I can only identify with the victims of the Holocaust. It is not within me to identify with others. The suffering was so overwhelming that I can only identify with the victims." With any feeling at all for the pain those memories bring to him, we can understand a little. Similarly we can understand the intensity of Japanese-American identification with life in the "reloca-

tion centers" and "detention camps." Certainly there were other actors in those tragedies, those who were responsible for the evil and suffering. But most people viewed those tragedies, as they do the Jonestown tragedy, with indifference.

And that indifference — not hate — is the opposite of love, Wiesel adds. Indifference is apathy, uncaring, neutrality. If, in our remembering of the Holocaust, of the incarceration of Japanese-Americans, and of Jonestown, we identify with the indifferent, we will have made a beginning to bring good from these tragedies.

While we identify with victims and with the indifferent, it is also important to remember that we are made of the same stuff as those who perpetrated the evil. Our failure to see in ourselves anything akin to what drove the Nazis in their evil — or at least our own indifference to injustice, suffering and evil — leaves us vulnerable to that evil in ourselves, and to its consequences.

Few people have been able to find any point of identification with those who died in Jonestown, except with the children and with those who fled when the others took the poison. As much as we might identify with the people of Bhopal, India — where toxic fumes from a chemical plant killed thousands of people and injured many thousands more — we are merely observers to that tragedy. Those of us within the radius of catastrophe of a failed nuclear reactor can imagine what happened at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union, and identify with the people affected by the radiation. But the mass murder and suicide of more than 900 people in Jonestown was so bizarre that, if it had not happened, we could not have imagined it. Having happened, we deny any connection with those who died.

We identify with our two daughters and grandson, and our friends in the Jonestown community. We identified with some of their hopes and dreams. At the same time, we ask ourselves how our daughters could have participated in the horrible events of the final day. Any number of young men and women have told us that they could see themselves involved in everything about the Jonestown project, including its last days. If flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone and spirit of my spirit could participate in the murder-suicide of Jonestown, I could act in some equally unbelievable way myself. It is one step from this self-destruction to know that the potential for destruction which is in all humans is in me as well. I own whatever humans do as arising out of the same stuff of which I am made. Whatever is human is not foreign to me.

Even after all these years, the media has yet to communicate anything of the humanness of the people of Jonestown. Nevertheless, the reality is that the members of Peoples Temple were like neighbors in the apartment building or house down the block. Patty, a large woman with grown children, made her way down the Kaituma River, laughing and talking with people as she bartered with other traders. Gene, a former attorney, experimented with citrus and other crops, and took pride in the stand of winged beans he had raised from 20 seeds. When he criticized the directions the community was taking in the final months, according to some survivors, he was drugged into acquiescence. Sebastian, a young black man, found a life in the jungle settlement he never had in the city. Sharon, a young mother, a social worker and a true believer, listened to the radio message signaling the end of Jonestown and took the lives of her two children and herself. Chuck could not read, but he was perceptive. He saw through the sham of Jim Jones' gimmicks and chose to go to Jonestown only to be close to his children. Larry, a quiet young man, was raised a Quaker and registered during the Vietnam War as a conscientious objector. He worked in a mental hospital for his alternative service, then joined the Temple as an opportunity to continue that service. Joe, who received his degree from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, spoke to us enthusiastically about the animal husbandry program he supervised in Jonestown. Odell, another black man, got help from the Temple in escaping the drug scene of Detroit; in return, he helped the Temple by running the day care center at the jungle colony. He says that he would have done anything for Jonestown, except to commit suicide. Mike was a pioneer who cleared the jungle where Jonestown eventually stood, whose loyalty switched from Jim Jones to the agricultural project itself, and whose disillusionment turned into petty rebellions in the final weeks. We knew all of them. We know others like them now.

We also knew the community itself. Life was good for most people there, especially the innocents, the children and old people. The elderly tended their flower gardens as they had back home. The babies born in Jonestown came into a community of love and support, and the people were justifiably proud of its infant and nursery facilities.

Apart from this knowledge of the young women and men, the children and youth, and the old folks of Peoples Temple, identification with them is impossible. Even a little knowledge — together with compassion — provides many points of identification. The Jonestown mirror shows us intimations of our responses to charismatic leader-

ship, peer pressure, and limited sources of information. The differences between the people of Jonestown and us are easy to see in the reflecting glass, but the similarities are there as well, if we look more closely.

*

Depending upon my mood of the day, I find it sometimes tragic, sometimes humorous, when I think of how blind people can be to the things they have in common with those who died in Jonestown. Flying from Reno to Ontario airport in Southern California a few days after the deaths, my brother sat next to a salty character who talked the entire flight. Bob described the conversation this way:

"He was telling me of his World War II army experiences in the South Pacific. Come to find out, he had been on the same small island as my brother. He spoke of island jungles, and that was my opening. I told him of just coming from Reno and of the family's loss. Stunned, he looked at me and exploded, 'No kidding!' He could make no sense of people killing themselves. He would never do it, he said.

"Well, in a minute, we were both back in the South Pacific. At one point he was telling me about the Japanese troops closing in on his men, and the possibility that they might be killed or taken prisoner. Then he added, 'But of course, I always saved one bullet for myself.'"

It is ironic that those who have the greatest difficulty identifying with true believers are themselves true believers. Those who rally behind the slogan "Better Dead Than Red," for example, have more in common with Jim Jones and his followers than they realize. While they condemned the Jonestown solution for Peoples Temple, they advocate it as the ultimate defense against the communist states of Europe and Asia.

The people of Jonestown, and of Masada before them, resisted the adversary until the last moment, when they chose death over life under the dominion of the adversary. Thank God most Jews during the 1930s and 1940s rejected the Masada solution. We grieve that members of Peoples Temple did not. We would grieve even more if the blindness of some people's anti-communism led to the same end.

Wherever we turn in our society, we see charismatic leaders leading throngs of people as the children followed the Pied Piper. The power of Ronald Reagan has been his charisma. He has touched the hopes and desires of the majority of Americans by telling them what they want to hear. Similarly, hundreds of thousands who suppose they could

never understand Jim Jones' followers make annual pilgrimages to Gracie Mansion, where Elvis Presley — whom they still call "the King" — is buried, and they return with relics and trinkets to cherish and venerate in their homes.

Krishnamurta wrote, "First people destroy their leader, then the leader destroys the people." This is the perfect description of what happened in Peoples Temple. Adulation of Jim Jones flowed like the Mississippi River. He not only accepted it; he consumed it. He could have stopped it, but he needed it much as an addict needs a fix.

In this way, too, Jonestown society was not very different from the societies within the military, corporations, high schools and gangs. How is it we recognize — and condemn — the peer pressure we saw as so powerful in Peoples Temple, and refuse to entertain the possibility of its existence in our lives around us? What prevents us from understanding the dangers of conformity within ourselves when we have the example of Jonestown shining as a beacon in the night?

A bishop had been invited to a dinner at a fraternity. Following the meal, the president asked him to say a word. The bishop spoke briefly. "Ten fraternity men were preparing for bed. Nine jumped into bed. One knelt to pray. That's courage." A student responded by saying, "No, bishop, I'll tell you what courage is. Ten bishops were preparing for bed. Nine knelt to pray. One jumped into bed. *That's* courage."

Not one in ten will stand against the crowd, whether in a fraternity or a church, whether in Jonestown or the U.S. One in a hundred with real courage is as much as we might hope for. Remembering Jonestown calls us to examine how easily we conform to our culture.

Control of information, and the consequent paranoia, undermined and destroyed Peoples Temple. I recall eating supper with the leadership when Barbara and I visited Jonestown in May 1978. One person spoke of the conspiracy against Jim Jones and the Temple. Person after person echoed identical feelings and perceptions. No one questioned or challenged what was being said. The blindness of Jones became the blindness of all. When I think of this experience, I recall a report of a friend after a VIP tour of the Strategic Air Command. Each general who spoke, he said, sounded like every other general. The same tape repeated itself, over and over.

Jim Jones and his trusted aides controlled the information coming into Jonestown, and Jim read the news himself over the public address system. We listened to him one evening in Jonestown as he reported a Soviet-Chinese incident as if the Soviet Union had launched

a major invasion. When we returned to Georgetown, Guyana's capital, I searched the papers for the story. I finally found an item, less than two column inches long, on a back page which referred to a border clash between Soviet and Chinese troops. I thought of that incident again in March 1988, when the Reagan Administration announced the invasion of Sandanista troops into Honduras. The hysteria over yet another border incident between the two Central American countries allowed the Defense Department temporarily to increase the size of a National Guard presence there. The distorted reporting to the American people served the Administration's interests, much as Jim's did his own.

Control of information is power, and businesses and governments alike continually decide which information they want to make public, and which they classify as secret. Washington plays an adversarial role with the media, often justifying secrecy and distortions in the name of "national security." We recognize Jonestown as a closed society, and declare it radically different from the U.S. Nevertheless, we must all view what information the government releases — and the media reports — with skepticism. Despite our openness, we must be vigilant against the same attempts at control and manipulation which succeeded in Jonestown.

If its distance from the U.S. and its size made the Jonestown community easier to manipulate and control, so too these afforded the opportunity for social experimentation not usually found in established societies. Members of Peoples Temple left the United States with disillusionment. They had lost hope in the people and national institutions to deal justly and humanely with the poor. They saw the nation turn inward after the civil rights struggle, glorifying self-interest and affluence. They were sensitive to those people with marginal skills whom society pushes aside. They felt with pain and anger the indifference and callousness of leaders and institutions towards the hopes of the weak and oppressed.

They weren't just leaving their native country, though. They went *to* Guyana with dreams and hopes. Older people looked forward to freedom from purse-snatchings, muggings, and the hard urban scene. Young people hoped to learn new skills, or to be encouraged by peers as they made new beginnings. Young and old hoped to find a new sense of dignity in a community which affirmed rather than debased the poor. Some saw themselves leaving a materialistic society for a community that placed people before possessions. Others were thrilled with the opportunity to pioneer in the jungle, like homesteaders in Alaska. Most

felt that they were participating in the creation of an ideal community. They were utopians who imagined that they could shape up the world, or at least their own community.

In spite of illusions, deception and manipulation, Jim Jones and his followers — except for the innocents — were responsible for their lives. In rebelling against the glorification of individualism in our society, their dream of community turned into a collectivist society which annihilated the self. They lacked a sense of the absurd in human existence. They couldn't laugh at themselves, nor make cartoons of their leader or movement. Cut off from their roots, and talking only to each other, their dreams ended in a Kafkaesque nightmare.

Criticisms of Peoples Temple and other new religious movements say as much about our culture as about these movements themselves. It is revealing that most Americans cannot identify with people who give up comfort and pleasure to risk everything for what they believe. The only commitment most of us understand is to the state or to self-aggrandizement.

The lesson of Jonestown is that good people are capable of evil acts. Those who made the fateful decision to murder their children and take their own lives regarded that decision as tragic, but not evil. We who survive them must be the ones to declare it to be both evil and tragic.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that, "Folly is a more dangerous enemy to the good than evil." This was true in Peoples Temple, and is equally true in our society. Just think of the atrocities, barbarities and horrors people have committed in the name of patriotism, "manifest destiny," "the white man's burden," and "the master race." We do not intend to do evil to our children, but our foolish use of technology casts an ominous shadow over those who come after us. Bonhoeffer adds that while the fool may be stubborn, he is not independent. "One feels in fact, when talking to him, that one is dealing not with the man himself, but with slogans and catchwords and the like, which have taken hold of him." We are all fools at times, but ideologues and all who are mesmerized by them are hopelessly trapped in folly's web.

Those of us who lost loved ones still ask: "How could they tolerate and justify actions they previously abhorred?" The truth is, the changes came slowly. There is no way they could have taken the final step without taking thousands of smaller steps before it. They cut a corner here, compromised there, diluted their integrity someplace else, justified today what they had rejected yesterday. During the Vietnam War, we spoke of "the escalation of terror." In Peoples Temple, and with us, it is

the escalation of compromise and corruption. Those who have engaged in little deceptions, accepted the devious practices of their associates, gone along with the boss or public against faithfulness to the Constitution and conscience, or set aside their principles in the name of convenience, can identify with those who died. The paranoia of Jonestown is obvious to us, even as we are blind to our own.

When pushed into a corner by the entourage of Congressman Ryan, the media and members of the Concerned Relatives, Jonestown reacted with violence. The end, already drawing near for the community, came quickly in a moment of apocalypse. We look with horror upon the mass murder-suicide in Guyana, and look away from our readiness to accept, and even initiate, murder and suicide on a planetary scale.

*

Life asks all of us how we will deal with tragedy. Some hold fast to utopian visions. Others escape life's harsh realities in channeling and the occult. Most in our land simply turn away as they consume more and more in the pursuit of pleasure. A few stoically accept tragedy and keep at their tasks. Despair and cynicism envelope others.

But there is another option, the resurrection option of working with God who is working to bring good from all situations. If the capacity for monstrous evil is within us, so also is the capacity to relieve suffering when we cannot prevent it, to search for truth and create beauty, and to persist in the struggle to bring universal good from out of personal tragedy.

The Contributors

Edward F. Breschel received his B.A. in Sociology from West Virginia Wesleyan College in 1982. He served for two years in the Peace Corps as a high school teacher in Kenya, East Africa. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. In 1987, he served as Vice-President of the Delta Chapter of Alpha Kappa Delta and was awarded the Master's level Phi Kappa Phi Scholarship.

Mr. Breschel's professional interests include medical sociology and sociology of religion. He is presently conducting research on comparisons between nineteenth century anti-Catholicism and twentieth century anti-cultism.

David G. Bromley, Ph.D., received his doctorate in Sociology from Duke University in 1971. After serving on the faculties of the University of Virginia, University of Texas at Arlington, and University of Hartford, he is currently Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and Senior Project Director in the Survey Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. His primary research interests are in the areas of sociology of religion, social movements, and deviant behavior.
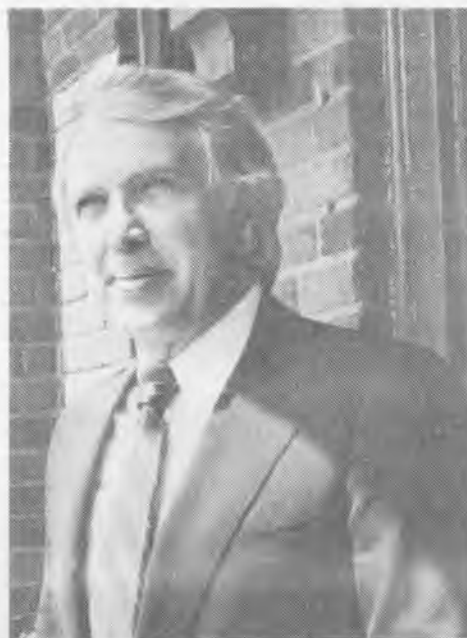
Dr. Bromley's most recent books include *The Future of New Religious Movements*, co-edited with Phillip Hammond (1987, Mercer University Press), *Falling from the Faith* (1988, SAGE Publications) and *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, edited with Larry Shinn (1988, Bucknell University Press). *Religious Apostasy: A Bibliography and Comparative History* is scheduled for publication by Garland Publishers in 1989.

Dr. Bromley is initiating a new series, Religion and the Social Order: New Directions in Theory and Research. The first volume of that series, *New Directions in the Study of Religion*, will be published in 1990.

Robert S. Fogarty, Ph.D., who earned his doctorate at the University of Denver, is a Professor of History at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and the editor of the *Antioch Review*. His published works include *The Righteous Remnant: The House of David* and *The Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History*. Parts of the essay appearing in this volume will appear in his forthcoming book, *All Things New*.

Recent articles by Dr. Fogarty have appeared in *The Quarterly* and *Prospects 10: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*.

Dr. Fogarty has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. He was a visiting fellow at All Souls College, Oxford in 1988.

John R. Hall, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He has written extensively on the Jonestown suicides, including the book *Gone From the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History* (1987, Transaction Books), as well as numerous other works on the sociology of culture. This essay is adapted from an earlier version which appeared in *Communal Studies* 8 (1988).

Barbara J. W. Hargrove, Ph.D., is a professor in the Sociology of Religion at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. She is the author or co-author of six books, including *The Emerging New Class: Implications for Church and Society* (1986, Pilgrim Press), *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (1983, Harper and Row), and *Religion for a Dislocated Generation* (1981, Judson Press). She also edited *Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*, published by The Edwin Mellen Press in 1985.

Dr. Hargrove is currently the editor of *Sociological Analysis*, the Journal of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, the Chair of the Committee on the Statistical Needs of the Church, Presbyterian Church of the USA, and a member of the National Council of Churches' Study Commission on Theology, Education and the Electronic Media.

Dr. Hargrove, who has also taught at Yale University Divinity School, the University of North Florida at Jacksonville, and Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia, earned her Ph.D. in Sociology at Colorado State University in Ft. Collins.

Chris Hatcher, Ph.D., is Clinical Professor of Psychology, University of California, San Francisco and Director, Center for the Study of Trauma. His area of expertise is in the management of violent behavior, with a particular interest in violent religious groups. In 1978, he was named Chair of the Joint Federal/State/Local Task Force on the Peoples Temple/Jonestown mass suicide/murder. This task force was designed to coordinate government responses to Peoples Temple survivors and to relatives of survivors. Dr. Hatcher has also assisted in trauma response teams for mass mur-

ders, aircraft crashes, and aircraft hijackings, both in the United States and in other countries. He is presently the Principal Investigator in the first nationwide study of the effects of abductions upon children and their families.

Constance A. Jones, Ph.D., received her doctorate in Sociology from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia in 1977. She has held appointments or been on the faculties of Agnes Scott College, Columbia Theological Seminary, University of California - Santa Barbara, and the Graduate Theological Union. At present she is Visiting Associate Professor of Sociology at Mills College in Oakland, California.

Professor Jones has published articles concerning new religious movements, gender studies and the sociology of India. Her work in progress includes *Hinduism in the United States*, a two-volume history of the dissemination of Hindu thought and practice in the U.S. The history will be published in 1989 by Garland Press. She is also working on *South Asian Religions in California*, which traces the dissemination of major religious traditions in California. The University of California Press will publish the volume in 1990.

John V Moore is a minister at the Davis United Methodist Church in Davis, California. He has previously served at churches in San Francisco, Chico, Hayward and Sacramento, California, and in Reno, Nevada. Dr. Moore was also Superintendent for the Bayview District for the Northern California/Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. In addition, he served on the Theological Study Commission of the United Methodist Church for four years and on the National Board of Church and Society for eight years.
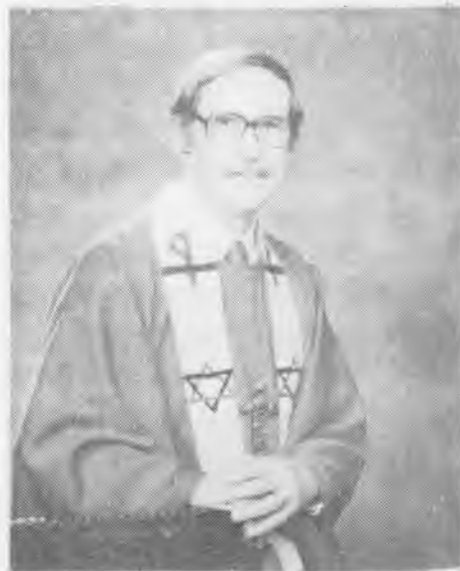
Dr. Moore was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley in 1965.

Dr. Moore lost two daughters and a grandson in Jonestown. The week following the suicides, Dr. Moore preached a sermon humanizing the Jonestown victims. The sermon was reprinted in numerous magazines and newspapers, both in the United States and overseas.

Michael Phillips, born in New York in 1938, was raised in San Francisco, where he currently lives. He was a banker for eight years and a key organizer of Mastercard. He rose to become one of the youngest vice presidents of any major bank in the country. In 1971, he became the business manager for Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco. There he started the Third World Tours, the first non-traditional tours of San Francisco that succeeded in bringing minority neighborhood issues to national attention, and conceived of Wino Park, the first park of its kind for black street people.

From his banking and foundation experience, he wrote the classic *The Seven Laws of Money* (Random House). His small business experience led him to co-author *Honest Business* (Random House), *Marketing Without Advertising* (Nolo Press) and *Running a One Person Business* (Ten Speed Press). His recent books on social issues include *Simple Living Investments*, *Baby Boom 2*, *Transaction Based Economics*, *Mental Snacks*, and *Mental Snacks 2* from Clear Glass Press.

Thomas Robbins, Ph.D., is an independent scholar. He received a doctoral degree in Sociology from the University of North Carolina and has taught or held research appointments at Yale University, Queens College of the City University of New York, Central Michigan University, the Graduate Theological Union, and the New School of Social Research.

Dr. Robbins is co-editor of *Cults, Culture and the Law* (1985, Scholars Press), *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America* (1981, Transaction) and *Church-State*

Relations: Tensions and Transitions (1987, Transaction). His latest monograph, *Cults, Converts and Charisma: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* was published in 1988 by SAGE Publications.

Dr. Robbins has published numerous articles on religious movements in sociology and religious study journals, including *Daedalus*, *The Nation*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Religious Studies Review*, *Concilium*, and *Social Problems*.

Stephen Rose is a writer, composer and theologian. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Williams College, with a Masters of Divinity from Union Seminary, Rose has written nine books, including *Jesus and Jim Jones*. He has served at Riverside Church, First Reformed Church, and with the Student Interracial Ministry as an assistant to the late Rev. Kelly Miller Smith.

Mr. Rose was the founder of *Renewal* and edited the magazine for ten years. He has also been an editor of *Risk*, *Christian Century*, and *Christianity and Crisis*. With a long history of social activism within the religious community, Rose organized efforts on behalf of the Black Manifesto. Recently he served as Executive Director of the Albert Schweitzer Center. He is also a professional song writer.

Anson Shupe, Ph.D., received his doctorate in Sociology from Indiana University. He has taught at Alfred University and the University of Texas at Arlington. He is currently Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne. His research interests include social and

religious movements, family violence, and mass communications.

    Dr. Shupe has authored or co-authored over 50 articles and book chapters, and 15 books for both popular and professional audiences, including *The Mormon Corporate Empire* (with John Heinerman), *New Christian Politics* (co-edited with David G. Bromley), *Violent Men, Violent Couples* (with William A. Stacey and Lonnie R. Hazlewood), and *Televangelism: Power and Politics on God's Frontier* (with Jeffrey K. Hadden). He also writes opinion page essays for a wide variety of newspapers, including *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*.

    Dr. Shupe has served as an officer in several professional associations, including the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Association for the Sociology of Religion, and the Association for the Scientific Study of Religion: Southwest.

Steven Stack, Ph.D., is a professor of Sociology at Auburn University in Alabama. He has written numerous articles on both suicide and religion for such publications as *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* --of which he is also a member of the editorial board — and *The Journal of Social Psychology.* He has received major grants from the National Institute of Mental Health to study structural media effects on suicide.

    Dr. Stack, who earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Connecticut at Storrs, has also taught in the Departments of Sociology at Penn State University, Indiana University, and Alma College in Alma, Michigan.

Judith M. Weightman, Ph.D. received her doctorate in Religion and Sociology from Drew University in 1983, and spent a year as a post-doctoral fellow in American Religion at Florida State University. Her book, *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides*, was published by Edwin Mellen Press in 1983.

Dr. Weightman has taught religion at Florida State University, Iowa State University, and the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh. She is currently working at the George S. MacManus Co., antiquarian book dealers, in Philadelphia.

The Editors

Rebecca Moore, who earned her Master's Degree in Film from American University in Washington, D.C., is a professional journalist with over fifteen years' experience writing for the print and broadcast media. Ms. Moore has also produced numerous television documentaries for instruction and entertainment. She currently serves as Community Relations Director for United Way for Northern Nevada and the Sierra.

Following the deaths of two sisters and a nephew in the Jonestown tragedy, Ms. Moore began to research the lives of Temple leaders and members, as well as the role of the U.S. government, both before and after the suicides. Her research has led to the writing of three books on Peoples Temple — *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown*, *The Jonestown Letters*, and *In Defense of Peoples Temple* — all published by Edwin Mellen Press.

Fielding M. McGehee III, who graduated from Antioch College with a combined degree in Political Science and Journalism, has worked as a writer and editor for twenty years. Much of his work in that time has been in producing publications for public interest organizations, including the National Council to Repeal the Draft, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, the Military Audit Project, and the Friends Committee on Legislation.

Mr. McGehee's freelance work has been published in many national publications and newspapers. He also established a press service to report California legislative news for the state's rural weekly papers.

Much of Mr. McGehee's work has involved extensive use of the Freedom of Information Act, and he has been involved in several lawsuits to force government agency compliance with the law and release of information.

Mr. McGehee has also worked on numerous political campaigns for passage of initiative issues, and created advertising themes for several candidates.

Mr. McGehee currently edits and produces three publications in northern Nevada.