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From Jones the Person to Jonestown the Community

Peoples Temple went through a period of rapid social change after relocating to Jonestown, Guyana. Most interpreters of Peoples Temple have commented on how the isolation of Jonestown promoted dependence on Jim Jones and heightened the already well-developed “insider-outsider” ideology of the organization. The shift that took place, however, was actually more dramatic and quite different from what this analysis suggests. I argue that the social change that occurred within Peoples Temple because of the move to Jonestown actually constituted a move *away* from Jim Jones’s control rather than toward greater dependence on him. Jones’s power unraveled within his own movement and authority shifted—perhaps including the authority to carry out the suicides—from a combination of Jones and his leadership circle to the leadership circle alone, specifically the women. The shift was away from an emphasis on Jones to an emphasis on the Peoples Temple community as a whole. It also solidified a transition in authority from the sect leaders to the new religious movement leaders that had already substantively taken place during the outreach to urban black church members in the early 1970s.

Jones’s Shifting Authority

Jonathan Z. Smith has named the change that took place in the move from California to Guyana as a shift from “subversive space” to “utopian space” (J. Z. Smith 1982, chap. 7). Peoples Temple in California had provided for its members, especially its black church members, what the “establishment space” would not or could not. While

openly participating in political and religious activism, Peoples Temple was also, less visibly, organizing its own oppositional social system. "Internally, it was a counterpolis. It had its own modes of leadership, its own criteria for citizenship, its own mores and laws, its own system of discipline and punishment" (115).

There were aspects of this oppositional social system that the mainstream public was bound to object to once they learned of them, including disciplinary boxing matches, "catharsis" meetings, and faked healings and discernments. Jones himself admitted that deception was involved in some of the healings he performed. "People pass growths and then by sleight of hand I started doing it—and that would trigger others to get healed. It was kind of a catalyst process, to build faith" (Hall 1987, 20). In July 1977 *New West Magazine* (Kilduff and Tracy, 1977) published an article "Inside Peoples Temple" based upon the testimony of ten apostates which alleged that numerous abuses of power were taking place within Jones's organization. Most of the accusations centered on Jim Jones specifically and were interpreted by some as politically motivated because Jones up to that point had been a well-respected and powerful participant in the liberal San Francisco political establishment. Especially damaging were reports of abusive disciplinary proceedings during which a person who had violated a Peoples Temple policy was made to box with a stronger loyalist (Reitman 1982, 259–60). There were also allegations of psychological abuse involving all night catharsis sessions during which members would "confess" to desires and behaviors ranging from homosexuality and child abuse to longing for more material things than were allowed under apostolic socialism (Hall 1987, 120–21). For Smith, Jones's move to Guyana was an exodus from the subversive space to the utopian precipitated by a recognition by the mainstream power structures that Peoples Temple was challenging race, class, age, and gender distinctions (J. Z. Smith 1982, 111).¹ Once the Peoples Temple subversion was widely known, it was bound to attract criticism that would make it difficult to continue to function in its dual role as both in and against mainstream society. The move to Jonestown was at least in part motivated by a desire to escape the close observation that the oppositional social system of People's Temple was beginning to attract.

1. Although more sensitive to the "ordinary humanness of the participants in Jonestown's White Night," Smith is still mostly concerned about Jim Jones in his analysis.

Doyle Paul Johnson, in a sociological analysis of the move to Jonestown, has suggested that charismatic leaders have historically chosen to relocate to isolated environments to consolidate their control over the group and to “avoid the contaminating and compromising influence of the wider society” (Johnson 1979, 318). Although it provides the desired social isolation, an unanticipated result of the move is that it actually weakens the leader’s position in the group. In response to the demands of an environment in which shelter, food, and the other necessities of life must be provided by the group members the leader spends much of his time organizing mundane activities (321). His charismatic authority and ability to inspire the group members spiritually and emotionally weakens just when the members need motivation for the hard work required to keep the community going. Even if the leader successfully delegates the organizational duties of the religious movement, “some members’ loyalty could be divided, and the original leader would no longer hold absolute sway over the group” (317).

Charismatic leadership is more important when a group is growing than when it is consolidating its life as a community. Therefore, Jones’s leadership was more central in California than in Jonestown. Jones’s importance as a leader was decreasing just when his capabilities as a community administrator were being put to the test. It was simply not possible for Jones to make all the decisions at Jonestown because of the emphasis on activities about which he had little or no knowledge: agriculture, livestock, carpentry, health care, and so on. As Rebecca Moore has pointed out, “The FBI has hundreds of tape recorded meetings which feature livestock and agriculture reports. Department leaders worked in relative freedom” (Moore 1985, 259). The more specialists were needed to run the daily operations of Jonestown—and this was certainly more the case in Guyana than in San Francisco—the less authority Jones had to make or influence decisions. In Guyana Jim Jones became more important symbolically as a mascot of cohesion than as a leader in the managerial sense. This shift had already taken place on a lesser scale as a result of the move from Indiana to California where people who were skilled at untangling the bureaucratic labyrinth of the social welfare system became more central to the Peoples Temple ministry. In Indiana Jones managed his church. In Guyana Jones was managed by his church.

There was a transition away from a focus on Jones at Jonestown in part because of a change in emphasis on the kind of healing taking

place. As mentioned in chapter 5, Jim Jones's apparent ability to perform miraculous healings was one of the attractions for people who joined his sect during the Indiana days. Even in the early 1970s in California there was an attempt on the part of the inner circle to "help" Jones to perform these cures to attract people to the movement. What motivated Carolyn Layton and others in leadership to assist in staging these faked healings was the belief that the ends justified the means; that, although people might be initially attracted because of the healings, in the end they would stay in Peoples Temple because of a commitment to social justice and the apostolic socialism they were modeling for the world (Reiterman 1982, 158–59). Alongside the "divine" healings that could be provided by Jones alone, there had always been a commitment—embodied initially by Marceline Jones—to provide top quality orthodox medical care for the elderly people who were a central concern for the movement since its inception.

As Peoples Temple grew in numbers and political influence in San Francisco, this focus on standard medical care came to be emphasized over the miraculous healings of Jim Jones. The healing power decentralized within the group and made the leadership less dependent on Jim Jones himself for attracting new members or for keeping current members satisfied. Although many scholars have suggested that it was primarily Jones's paranoia and the inner circle's utopian ideology that drove the group to relocate to Guyana, I suggest that in addition to these reasons the move constituted a cost-effective measure to consolidate the care for the elderly and children who made up the majority of members of Peoples Temple. It cost less to provide medical care, housing, and a safe environment for the community in one location than it did to call on services spread throughout San Francisco, Los Angeles, Redwood Valley, and Ukiah. There is no indication that at Jonestown Jim Jones ever performed a divine healing. The medical care was provided by a staff of well-trained nurses and a doctor, Larry Schacht, who had been sent to medical school at Temple expense. It is ironic, in a way, that the agricultural mission in Guyana was named Jonestown as, significantly, Jones himself was less central to the religious organization than at any point before the move. One of the reasons for the marginalization of Jones's charismatic authority within his own movement was probably his increasing dependence on drugs and his subsequent lack of reliability. The most important shift that occurred when Peoples Temple moved to Jonestown was that Jim Jones became a liability rather than an asset to the community.

Jones's Deteriorating Mental and Physical Health

Many authors have raised the issue of Jones's drug abuse but, generally, by way of demonstrating his unique privileges relative to those of the average Peoples Temple member, who was forbidden the use of drugs. I suggest that his incapacitation from drug abuse shifted the responsibility for the community more and more into the hands of his inner circle. The most reliable evidence of Jones's drug dependence comes from the observations of his physician, the postmortem autopsy report, and the comments of his son, Stephan Jones. Rebecca Moore notes that Dr. Carlton Goodlett, Jones's physician in San Francisco, said that Jones was "frying his brain" with drugs and that he had noticed that the refrigerator in Jones's cabin at Jonestown was well stocked with drugs (Moore 1985, 221). The autopsy report on Jim Jones reveals that he had been ingesting pentobarbital, a tranquilizer, for a long-enough period before dying that his body had built up a resistance to its potentially lethal effects:

The tissue levels of pentobarbital are within the toxic range, and in some cases of drug overdose, have been sufficient to cause death. The liver and kidney pentobarbital levels are within the generally accepted lethal range. The drug level within the brain is not within the generally accepted lethal range, and brain levels are the most important as far as vital functions are concerned. The cause of death is not thought to be pentobarbital intoxication because: (1) the brain level is low, as stated above (2) tolerance can be developed to barbiturates over a period of time and (3) the lethal level of a drug varies from individual to individual. (Moore 1985, 222)

Stephan Jones confirmed his father's growing incapacitation from abuse of drugs. He described his father as a "weak and sick human being" who was "pretty lost long before Jonestown." Jones was "whacked out on drugs" and often spoke both privately and over the loudspeaker in slurred words. His son believed that it was only a matter of time before the drugs Jones was taking would kill him. Stephan Jones observed that during the summer and fall of 1978 his father was "increasingly out of control" and would stagger about in front of Peoples Temple members, even urinating off the boardwalk in Jonestown within a few yards of where people were meeting (S. G. Jones interview, 7 Dec. 1992). Shiva Naipaul's interview with Andrea Walker, a

young black woman who had lived in Jonestown for six months starting in March 1978 supports Stephan Jones's observations. She told Naipaul that she had enjoyed her experience at Jonestown until August 1978 when Jones started holding meetings every night: "He said he wanted to keep everyone together. He was so sick he would talk to us from his house with a loudspeaker. His voice was slurred" (Naipaul 1981, 153).

By 7 November 1978, only eleven days before the suicides, Jones was "unable to walk without assistance . . . [and] appeared with his face hidden behind a mask of white gauze" when consular officials came for a visit (Naipaul 1981, 155).

Several observers commented on the decline of Jones's physical health beginning at the end of 1977, when his mother, Lynetta Jones, died, and linked it with his increasing abuse of drugs. Debbie Layton Blakey, who had not seen Jones for several months before she and her mother moved to Jonestown in December 1977, observed that Jones had "deteriorated" since she had last seen him, that "physically, he was a wreck."

He had gained a great deal of weight, and he complained constantly of such a number of serious ailments that it was a wonder he was still on his feet at all. He claimed to have cancer, a heart condition, a fungus in his lungs, and a recurring fever of 105 degrees. He dosed himself with painkillers, tranquilizers, and amphetamines, which only added to the incoherence of his speech. (Yee and Layton et al., 1981, 222–23).

The autopsy performed on Jones revealed that he, in fact, had none of these ailments (Moore 1985, 222). Perhaps his claims of serious illness were a way both to justify his abuse of drugs and to explain why he was no longer as central to the life of the community. Certainly, it was a mark of loyalty and commitment to give oneself body and soul to the movement. Grace Stoen and Debbie Blakey both mention that it was seen as a sign of one's commitment to the mission of the Temple to have as little sleep as possible (G. S. Jones interview, 3 Dec. 1992).² Therefore, Jones's supposed ill health and subsequent need for drugs was likely to have been perceived not as a sign of

2. See also the Blakey affidavit in Rose 1979, 170: "Dark circles under one's eyes or extreme loss of weight were considered signs of loyalty."

weakness, but as a mark of the self-sacrificing leader who was willing to give everything for the ideas he believed in and the people he led.

At first his drug abuse appears to have been known only by a few—Marceline Jones, Stephan Jones, Carolyn Moore Layton, Annie Moore, Karen Layton—those who were the most intimate with Jones and, with the exception of Stephan Jones, helped him to acquire and take the drugs he needed. According to their passports, both Karen Layton and Carolyn Moore Layton made frequent trips to Venezuela. A private investigator indicated that Karen Layton's trips were primarily to purchase drugs for the Jonestown clinic (Moore 1985, 222). One FBI interviewee indicated that Carolyn Layton had made trips to Mexico to obtain illegal drugs to help supply Jones with medication for his various physical ailments.³ Although there is no concrete evidence to support my speculation, could the initial decision to locate the Peoples Temple Agricultural Mission in Guyana have had more to do with the availability of drugs and the excuse to travel frequently to and from South America? Jones's publicly stated reasons were that Guyana was both safe in the event of a nuclear disaster and a socialist government.⁴

Marceline Jones and Annie Moore have each been identified by those who have written on Peoples Temple as involved in the management of Jones's drug consumption. What has not been noted is that each was in charge during two different periods of the Temple's history. Marceline Jones had been regulating and, in some cases administering, Jim Jones's drug intake since the Indiana years, when she used to inject Jones with vitamin B12 after his frequent collapses (Reiterman 1982, 74). Reiterman points out that it is not possible to know whether Jones was abusing drugs at that time but notes that he certainly had access to Darvon. "Whether he was abusing drugs at this time is not known—but he certainly had access to prescription drugs. He once

3. FBI, Guyana Evidence Index, 89-4286, report 19.

4. Upon what was the decision to move to California based? In casual conversations with residents of Redwood Valley during December 1992, several mentioned that the Ukiah area was "the drug capital of California," and, because of that reputation, they are used to people moving to their town to have easy access to drugs. Although the people I talked with had many negative things to say about their experience of having had Peoples Temple in Redwood Valley, many expressed surprise at how "clean" the members were with regard to drugs. The people of Redwood Valley are still very much affected by their involvement in the Jonestown saga and can recount people and incidents with great emotion and immediacy.

offered [Rev.] Winberg some Darvon for a headache" (583). By the time they had moved to California Marceline Jones was attempting to control Jim Jones's drug use. The following incident was said to have taken place around 1970:

He reportedly had begun abusing drugs, taking stimulants, painkillers and tranquilizers to suit his mood and purpose. Marceline became concerned about this new source of friction and psychological problems. It came to a head once when she grabbed the stash from his medicine chest and, while Jones struggled with her, flushed his drugs down the toilet. (125)

It is not clear how early Jones's drug use became a serious problem although the above suggests that it was earlier than the move to Jonestown. A person who had moved with his family from Indiana to California and was among those who defected in 1973 described Jones as "probably being a heavy narcotics user" even at that time.⁵

In a sense the shift in power from the Indiana sect to the California new religious movement members is mirrored in the transfer of the drug administering and controlling roles from Marceline Jones to Annie Moore, sister of Carolyn Moore Layton.⁶ Moore was the bond nurse with access to the community's supply of drugs, a great convenience in that it meant the amount and number of drugs Jones was taking was not known to anyone but herself. In a letter written by Moore to Jim Jones, which was discovered in Jones's cabin after the suicides, it is clear that she had taken over the function that his own wife had once fulfilled.

I just wanted for you to know that I do not mind being your nurse and there is nothing more I would rather be. You should not feel guilty for having me watch you. I would rather be around you than anyone else in the world. I like to be here, it is not a burden. I will do everything I can think of to help keep you going. You have given everything to me so anything I can do for you is only right for me to do and I do not resent anything. If I seem irritated when trying

5. FBI, Guyana Evidence Index, 89-4286, report 2.

6. Although Stephan Jones does not believe that Annie Moore held much actual decision-making authority at Jonestown, he believes that rank and file members may have thought she did because of the access she had to Jim Jones (S. G. Jones interview, 19 Dec. 1992).

to put you to sleep, it is because of frustration I have that it all has some bad side effect. But I am not mad at you. I will try not to show frustration any more. Sometimes I leave because I have to take care of other problems in the Bond or because I hope you will fall asleep before I come back but not because I don't want to be here. I like for you to be able to sleep and when they build the pool, I'll be out there checking also. I just thought I should let you know so you won't be feeling guilty about this. (I get more bookwork done down here anyway.) From Annie (signed). (Moore 1985, 306–7)

Apparently, some members of the community objected to the favored status that Moore enjoyed because of her position as Jones's nurse and Carolyn Layton's sister. In a letter written to Jim Jones at Jonestown Moore complains about a woman who was accusing her of behaving like an elitist:

Yesterday she had the nerve to say that Phyliss Chaikin preferred Terry Jones and myself being that Terry is Lew's wife and I am Carolyn's sister. . . . Then she was talking smart ass and said she knows Annie (me) takes Dad's blood pressure but she was tired of hearing about it (from me). Which I have only told her 3 or 4 times to my knowledge for why I had to temporarily leave work. I try to *never* tell her that that is what I am doing but Carolyn told me to just tell her one day that that was what I had to do. So I did and she used it. She said that I always had to go to East House [where Jones lived] . . . and that I just used Dad's name to go and goof off. (CHS, BB-2B-d-1)

By November 1978 it was becoming clear to those outside Jones's most intimate inner circle that Jones was on drugs. Ten days before Congressman Ryan's scheduled visit, two American Embassy officials paid a visit to Jonestown and reported that "Jim exhibited erratic behavior, slurred speech, and mental confusion." In addition Jones wore a surgical mask during lunch and "appeared to need help in standing up during a luncheon meeting" (Moore 1985, 307). Around that same time Jones's son, Jimmy, recalled that he, "found him [Jones] in bed and so doped up that he was nearly comatose. 'I dragged him into the shower, and stood there and held his dick so he could go pee. . . . He was passing green pee—always stuck with me, it was green-bean-green pee. He was telling me how Marceline was trying to poison him' " (Wright 1993, 81).

When I asked Dr. Chris Hatcher during our interview who knew that Jim Jones was deteriorating, he named Marceline Jones, Stephan Jones, Carolyn Moore Layton, Annie Moore, and Mike Prokes. Hatcher added that most of the membership probably also realized but that “they didn’t want to know as much as they did” because to acknowledge to themselves that they were being led by a sick and drug-dependent man would be to call the commitment and sacrifices they had made into question (Hatcher interview, 1 Dec. 1992).

Cognitive Dissonance at Jonestown

This denial of facts to support an overarching worldview is an example of what the social psychologist Leon Festinger calls “cognitive dissonance” (Festinger 1957). According to Festinger, people’s willingness to delude themselves about facts is in direct proportion to the degree of involvement that they have with the idea or group. A person will discount or avoid any information that might force a change in behavior or belief that has been held for a long time or has been committed to deeply. In short, it simply would have “cost” the average Peoples Temple member too much psychologically, not to mention socially and economically (especially in the case of urban black church members), to admit that Jones was anything other than the leader they had been attracted to and loved. The inner circle, by contrast, were faced with a sufficient number of “disconfirmatory facts” because of their frequent and intimate involvement with Jones to convince them that Jones had become a liability to the movement.

There are three possible responses to disconfirmatory evidence that challenge the group members’ belief system: (1) discard the original belief; (2) tolerate the dissonance; or (3) underplay or discount the disconfirmatory event(s) (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956, chap. 1). The average residents at Jonestown could ignore Jones’s drug abuse because their individual contact with him was limited and their experience of Peoples Temple depended more on the immediate circle of friends and fellow members with whom they lived and worked than on their personal relationship with Jones. The people who were in the most intimate contact with Jones, however, did not have that option. Their loyalty to Peoples Temple’s vision for a just society made discarding their belief in Jim Jones as leader very difficult. At the same time, Jones’s increasingly erratic behavior made the problem difficult

to ignore. Those who were close to Jones found their ability to tolerate the dissonance that this conflict created repeatedly challenged by the demands of communal life and the pressure from Concerned Relatives. According to Festinger, when cognitive dissonance becomes intolerable, only the continual reaffirmation of the belief system on the part of supporting co-believers will keep that belief system in place (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956, chap. 8). The demonization of Tim and Grace Stoen, the Mertles, and Debbie Blakey helped the inner circle to affirm the choice they had made to stay loyal to Peoples Temple no matter how bad things became. But, tragically, this demonization of those who had left made discarding their original beliefs and leaving the community an impossibility, so that eventually only death provided a way to end the dissonance and to stay loyal to the belief system. (The idea that life could be more expendable than a belief system was a possibility Festinger never considered.)

By May 1978 Jim Jones's status in Peoples Temple had changed. When Reverend John and Barbara Moore visited their two daughters, Carolyn and Annie, at Jonestown that month, Reverend Moore observed that there was an "enormous contrast between the adulation of Jim which was a part of the affairs we attended at the church in S.F. and L.A. and the absence of this in Jonestown." He concluded that this shift resulted from "living more distant from criticism"—perhaps the accusations against Jones by the media and the Concerned Relatives had helped solidify his centrality in the movement in the United States—and "perhaps more important, the project speaks for itself" (Moore 1986, 237–38.) Moore was very impressed with the community at Jonestown, particularly the health care for the elderly and the spirit of cooperation and love that he and his wife witnessed.⁷ He suggested that the success of the community, which had been built through the collective efforts of all, not merely through the charismatic leadership of Jones, had shifted the emphasis from Jones the person to Jonestown the community.

By fall 1978 the ability of the leadership circle to keep Jones from discrediting himself to the Jonestown community may have reached a crisis. As Stephan Jones pointed out, toward the end in Jonestown "everyone wanted to make the hold that Jim Jones had over them go

7. For the article the Moores wrote upon arriving home from their trip to Jonestown see Rose 1979, 161–63, app. 10.

away”; therefore it took only a small, but provable inconsistency on Jim Jones’s part to convince people that the “whole structure was corrupt” (S. G. Jones interview, 11 Dec. 1992).

Even Tim Jones, an adopted son of Jim and Marceline and a deeply loyal follower, went so far as to imitate his father’s slurred speech over the public address system one evening in the autumn of 1978. As Jones’s surviving sons recalled: “People were agog: no one had ever mocked Father. Even more astonishing was the fact that nothing happened to Tim as a result. There was a sense of liberation—and also of uncertainty. People began to allow themselves to wonder what life in Jonestown would be like without Jones” (Wright 1993, 80).

Just before this incident, Tim Jones had caught his father in a lie. He had been told by Jim Jones that a young black woman, Shuwana Harris, had been begging sex from him. It was not until Tim intercepted a note from Harris to Jones saying that she did not want to have sex with Jones again that Tim realized that his father was capable of twisting the truth to manipulate people. Shortly thereafter, Harris was seen drugged and incoherent, a situation the Jones brothers interpreted as an attempt by Jones and others to keep Harris quiet and compliant. Thereafter, Tim Jones was skeptical of his father’s leadership. These incidences of broken trust between Jim Jones and his most intimate circle were repeated over and over again in the final months at Jonestown, according to Stephan Jones (S. G. Jones interview, 7 Dec. 1992). Stephan had had a similar eye opening experience some months earlier when his father had claimed he was being shot at by someone in the jungle and sent Stephan out after the gunman. Stephan, who spent a great deal of time in the jungle surrounding Jonestown, knew that a person could not have approached from the direction designated by his father. After realizing that the threat to his father’s life had been a fake, Stephan began to question his father’s leadership more generally, and even vocally, in the community.

A useful theoretical method that Michel Foucault uses in his historical analyses is to go back to the time before the “rupture” in history that marks the shift from one paradigm to another and to examine the various possibilities still in play that later disappeared. “It is fruitful,” Foucault has pointed out, for the intellectual “to describe that-which-is by making it appear as something that might not be” (Foucault 1988, 36). The importance of this method is that it screens out the “inevitability factor” that frames the outcome as having been

the result of predictable and cumulative causes. The result of applying Foucault's method is that the shift that does take place or, as in the case of Jonestown, the decision that *does* get made is represented in the context of the complex dynamics that influenced it. The three possibilities other than suicide that the Jonestown leadership could have chosen were to (1) maintain the status quo, (2) disperse the community, or (3) replace Jim Jones as leader.

As suggested above, maintaining the status quo was increasingly difficult at Jonestown because of Jones's drug dependence and the mounting pressure from the lobbying efforts of Concerned Relatives. In addition, the relationship between Jonestown and the Guyanese government, which had been supporting the community for its own political reasons, had the potential to change because of the negative news coverage Peoples Temple was receiving and the involvement of a U.S. congressional representative in the investigation of Jonestown. But even more important was the plain fact that to continue Jonestown as it had been functioning for the previous twelve months would have meant a continuation of the exhaustion and pressure for the third of the community who worked to support the rest. Something had to change.

Reactions to the Increase in Internal Pressure

In his interviews with me Stephan Jones stressed that although the "aristocracy," or "white elite" as he sometimes called them, had more authority at Jonestown than did the majority of members, they did not have special privileges. They worked the same hours and ate the same food as everyone else. He called the women who surrounded his father "sacrificial martyrs," who were controlled by their desire to win Jones's approval and to prove to the rest of the community that they were as committed to the cause of social justice, although they were white, as any urban black person (S. G. Jones interview, 11 Dec. 1992). Further, by the time Debbie Blakey defected in May 1978, the leadership was constantly in turmoil, with frequent reactions of depression and anger to the predictable challenges of living in community (S. G. Jones interview, 19 Dec. 1992). Leading Jonestown was no longer any fun. It was constant work, and neither Jones nor the members of the community seemed to appreciate the long hours and dedication of the inner circle.

As tired and dispirited as they were, dispersing the community was

not an option for the inner circle in part because of the consistent demonization of those who had left Peoples Temple. To give up would have been, in effect, to surrender to the demands of the Concerned Relatives and defectors such as Tim Stoen and Debbie Layton. By the fall of 1978 even to suggest such an option would have been seen by Jones and others in leadership as an act of treachery and betrayal. But if neither status quo nor dispersal were viable options, what of replacing Jones as leader of the movement?

Was a Peoples Temple without Jim Jones as charismatic leader ever a serious consideration for those in leadership? Aside from the shift explored earlier, which suggests that the group in Guyana was no longer dependent on him as a healer or manager and that his role as charismatic leader was no longer as central to the Temple because recruitment was no longer a primary concern, an exercise that took place in a security meeting might be interpreted as a “trial balloon” for replacing Jones. The question was, “What would be my reaction if you [Jones] were to suddenly be assassinated or die?” (It is not clear from the documents under what circumstances the question was asked or whether Jones was present.) The date on the answer by Mary Lou Clancey was 4 July 1978. She was a white female, twenty-four years of age, with just over one year of college education, and with training as a community health worker. She joined the Temple in Redwood Valley and would die, along with the others, at Jonestown. She was part of the Peoples Temple Planning Commission in San Francisco and served on the security council at Jonestown. After vowing “revenge” as her first priority, she wrote:

The continuation of Jonestown would be the hard part. Because it has been *your* total commitment and strategies that have kept our organization going in a positive strain . . . I know myself that I could do my best to maintain under a new (designated by you) leadership—and continue to aid the work by following the principles [*sic*] and guidelines you have so carefully & thoroughly set. If this would be the collective decision I would help. This may mean “putting under the gun” many so-called followers who could not maintain. *So be it.* (CHS, C-5-a-5/5a; italics in original)

The minutes of a Peoples Rally Agricultural Meeting (the “Peoples Rally,” sometimes referred to as the “Peoples Forum,” described

in Peoples Temple literature as “the primary governing body including all citizens, practicing a total participatory democracy, even of school-age children” [CHS C-11-e-14b]) for that same day, July 4, state, “The new system of Troika was explained down thru all the individual departments” (C.H.S C-11-d-5a). Troika, or the Triumvirate, as it is sometimes referred to in other Jonestown reports, was never clearly spelled out in any of the documents. It appears to have been an expansion in leadership with an attempt to include two people, in addition to Jones, in the central leadership role at Jonestown.⁸ Three days prior, on 1 July, at another Peoples Rally a note at the bottom of the agenda reads, “Reminder: Dad said publicly wants to discuss new management idea” (CHS, C-11-d-6). It is possible that Jones was cooperating with the coup because he was himself aware that fatigue and drug abuse were making him incapable of leading the community. On 5 July there was a meeting of the “Troika with the ACACs” (CHS, C-11a-17a). The ACACs were the members of the Community Advisory Committee at Jonestown, essentially the representatives of the community to the leadership circle.

From the information currently available it is not possible to know who would have run Jonestown had Jim Jones either died or otherwise stepped down from leadership. The FBI documents cited in chapter 4 suggest that Carolyn Layton was a possibility. Grace Stoen, when commenting on Mike Prokes’s March 1979 suicide, suggests he was another possibility:

I was very disappointed in Mike . . . because he has “off the record” told reporters he used to work with in Modesto that Jones was a bad person and that he did terrible things to his members. Mike wanted to leave, but the only reason he stayed in the church was because he was counting on Jones dying soon and he wanted to be there to help run the Jonestown commune correctly. (Naipaul 1981, 169)

It is possible that Carolyn Layton and Mike Prokes might have been leadership possibilities together as they were widely acknowledged as being among the “intelligentsia” of Jonestown (Moore 1985,

8. Reiterman (1982, 346) identifies the Triumvirate as Carolyn Layton, law student Harriet Tropp, and Johnny Brown Jones, an adopted son of Jim and Marceline; there is no footnote for this information, however, so it is difficult to verify.

100).⁹ Hatcher has written that Prokes was “frequently called the number two person in the Jonestown organization,” an assertion he based upon his many interviews with survivors of Jonestown (Hatcher 1989, 140).

Yet another potential leader was Stephan Jones, as suggested by an undated letter from Tish Leroy (a.k.a. Laetitia Eichler) to Stephan after a public conflict between him and his father. Leroy was a middle-aged white woman who had joined Peoples Temple in Redwood Valley. She had some college education and had been a Temple accountant and notary public since the early 1970s. She and her eighteen-year-old daughter both died at Jonestown.

It was after you had contradicted and criticized dad, and then told the second in command to “fuck you,” that I shouted at you. You were shaking the *fabric* of our organization and I did not think you realized it! The concrete walls had suddenly become cloth and looked *about* to rupture or tear. . . . You as a potential leader should have respect for the existing leader, *IF HE IS WORTHY!* . . . When you do not show it, then question arises [*sic*] that you in fact think him *worthy*. (CHS, C-10-a-c; emphases in original)

Not only does this suggest that replacing Jones was on the minds of people but it shows the precariousness of the leadership situation at Jonestown. What also becomes clear in the remainder of the letter is that while the community of Jonestown was being told that it was engaged in a total participatory democracy, in fact, the average citizen was a member of an audience being played to by the leadership. “Many times I have felt Dad did not have all the facts, or that he on occasion had not evaluated everything accurately—and I have written notes to this effect. . . . He has stated that we should NOT CRITICIZE HIM PUBLICLY” (CHS, C-10-a-c; emphasis in original).

After discussing the plan to commit suicide and reaffirming her support of it, Tish Leroy closes the letter with a postscript: “Your Mom has my total respect & I’d not hesitate to follow her in life or to my death” (CHS, C-10-a-c). When I asked Stephan Jones what the dispute was about that prompted this public expression of his unhappi-

9. Carolyn Moore Layton and Mike Prokes were married in December 1974. There was, apparently, no conjugal relationship between them. The decision to marry was based upon wanting Layton’s unborn child to be legitimate because Jim Jones, who was the acknowledged father, would continue to be legally married to Marceline.

ness with his father's leadership, he recalled that it was in reaction to Jim Jones accusing him of being afraid to die (S. G. Jones interview, 19 Dec. 1992).

This Peoples Rally at which Stephan Jones challenged his father, apparently included an unsuccessful attempt to solidify loyalty in the form of a suicide rehearsal. It took place sometime between when Debbie Layton Blakey defected in May 1978 and when her mother Lisa Layton died the following October. (Annie Moore writes about the Blakey defection and Dick Tropp's letter addresses some concerns of Lisa Layton.) Dick Tropp wrote a "personal" letter to "Dad" about the events of that summer night:

I feel that it is my duty to share these thoughts with you. About an hour ago Lisa Layton said she wanted to speak with me. She said that after the white night she felt a kind of angry feeling inside. . . . She felt she'd "been had." Deceived. . . . She said she felt the information given to the congregation was inaccurate and incomplete, and that she couldn't make a decision based upon it. . . . I feel that Lisa's reaction is a danger sign. I personally did not know all of the details, but my feeling was very definite that we were being tested on our collective and individual determination to die. But this time, I felt that the kind of necessary collective testing didn't quite come across authentic. My apprehension is that among the Lisa Layton-Marlene Wheeler-Jann Gurvich segment of our community, in other words, people with a fair degree of savvy and intelligence, there is going to be a feeling from now on that the white night is really a kind of elaborate ritual testing. . . . those voting against immediate "revolutionary suicide" are subject to questioning that contains within it a not-so-subtle intimidation that they are either cowards or disloyal or too attached to living. (CHS, N1C3a)

He closes with a reference to Stephan's public challenge and with a warning to Jones that continuing to test people's loyalty was having just the opposite effect from that intended: it was breeding distrust and anger toward Jones rather than building up the community as the previous white nights had. Dick Tropp's critique was taken seriously by Jones because he was among the educational elite at Jonestown, holding a master's degree from the University of California at Berkeley. Tropp, a Jew from New York and former professor of English at Santa Rosa Community College, was the author of most Temple press releases and was collecting material to write an authorized biography of

Jones when the suicides took place (Reiterman 1982, 428). He and his sister Harriet, a law student, were among the “aristocracy” at Jonestown. Apparently, his letter was circulated among the second tier leaders, for several letters within the files include comment upon it.

Around this time Tish Leroy wrote a private letter to Jones, stating her frustration with the way personal views were censored in supposedly “open” discussions about Temple policy.

I observe a lot in silence, and though I can always justify the lies that get told, I deeply resent being told them—I understand the ends justify the means. The undersurface of me resents terribly being stifled and stopped in expressing—we are not allowed to give honest opinions, for these are dictated as policy and it is treasonous to have differing thoughts. Yet, I can also give you a whole list of “wrong” thoughts I did express, to the tune of being blasted and humiliated for it and told how wrong I was—only to watch events prove me right. . . . If we must “conform” our thoughts, I’ll never make it. I must say yes with my mouth if it’s good for the collective, but my mind will scream “no” till my dying breath. I feel at times like a misfit, but I know I’ll never leave. I love what we have too much. It’s far more important than me or mine. (Reiterman 1982, 430)¹⁰

An additional measure of the concerns that were foremost in the minds of the inner circle is the educational and self-analysis assignments that were given to members during the evening “adult education” classes. These written assignments on set questions were required for all adult members of the community. Two sheets of paper were to be handed in by adults, three sheets by high school students; they were part reeducation and part survey or poll. It is not clear whether these classes were weekly or more frequent or who designed them. Carolyn Layton may have been influential in the process because she was directing the Jonestown educational program and taught political philosophy. There is an emphasis in the questions on ideological concerns. Clearly, there was more than occasional rebellion against doing the assignments because the woman who collated the answers complained about papers not being turned in and teachers handing in incorrect lists of completed assignments (CHS, C-5-a-30). A random scan of the papers recovered from Jonestown after the suicides revealed the following topics: confessions of “crimes” against the community;

10. There is no note for this letter to indicate when precisely it was written.

why members had left the United States; to whom they were sexually attracted. Specific questions noted at the top of answer sheets included "how I feel about socialism and belief; the reasons that you brought us to this place of safety are; why I am here; self-analysis; methods to get enemies." The phrase "each according to his abilities, each according to his needs" was mentioned frequently in many of the answers, indicating that this was a central philosophy of the Jonestown community.

As one of these community assignments, Jonestown residents were asked to consider "Dad's worst pain." The most popular answers were about Jones's physical ailments and his emotional hardship as a result of "traitors" leaving the movement. Several answers mention Jones's "blood sugar problems" in particular, which may have been how Jones and the leadership explained to the community his drug abuse symptoms such as drowsiness and slurred speech. Certainly, Jones mentioned his blood sugar level with some frequency at Peoples Rallies (CHS, C-11-d-9c; C-11-d-11c; C-11-d-14a).

At a Peoples Rally on 20 December 1977 there is a note in the minutes that, "Dad collapsed due to the below 45 point sugar count. Dr. Schacht, Nurse Practitioner Parks and others helped to administer oxygen and medication to Dad" (CHS, C-11-d-14g). A considerable number of answers suggested that the reason for Jones's poor health was because of the drain that "selfish, inconsiderate, unkind and ignorant people" put on him (FF-5-n-8). Many people vowed to be better socialists and more loyal so as to spare "Dad" the pain of disappointment.

One answer to this question is particularly interesting with regard to the possibility of a leadership shift. "An extremely strong leader is needed to keep together this kind of group. Mother is the prototype of everything next in a woman . . . but I don't know if people are ready to follow a woman. Once you alluded to your concern about having a leader to follow you. I was thinking these thoughts at the time" (CHS, FF-5-m).

Another tantalizing piece of evidence that suggests a leadership transition was in the making comes from a letter dated 13 September 1978 from Jim Jones to his bank:

It is my wish at this time that my name, James W. Jones be removed as signatory to the accounts I have established in your banking institution. Marceline Mae Jones shall remain as signatory to the above accounts. Further I wish to create a power of attorney over

these accounts in the name of Carolyn M. Layton. You already have her signature card on file at your bank. I wish this power of attorney to be the kind which survives after death. If there are any papers I need to sign in order to make this change please give them to Mrs. Layton to bring to me to sign. (CHS, A-40-c-4)

It is possible that Jim Jones knew how ill he had become and could see that his behavior was beginning to harm the movement to which he had given his life. There was, perhaps, a struggle within himself whether or not to step down voluntarily. Stephan Jones told several stories during interviews that demonstrate the level of stress and conflict within the inner circle during the fall of 1978 and their increasing dissatisfaction with Jones's leadership. These incidents are especially relevant because they take place among Jones, his two most intimate confidantes, Maria Katsaris and Carolyn Layton, and his son Stephan.¹¹

In late September or October 1978, after yet another attempt by Grace and Tim Stoen to obtain legal custody of John Victor, Jones wanted Stephan Jones to help him stage a kidnapping of the little boy. Maria Katsaris provided most of the childcare for John Victor at Jonestown, and she objected to the kidnapping scheme on the grounds that the experience would be terrifying for the six year old. Katsaris told Stephan Jones that she would not allow him to go through with the kidnapping. This was a significant step for Katsaris to have taken because Stephan Jones had never before heard her question either publicly or privately a decision that Jim Jones had made (S. G. Jones interview, 11 Dec. 1992). In that moment Katsaris demonstrated a rupture in her loyalty to Jones, for she chose her love for John Victor over her willingness to follow Jones's orders.

The three scenes of conflict between Jones and Layton that Stephan Jones witnessed and participated in during the fall of 1978 were especially traumatic for him because during the ten years Stephan had known her, he had never heard Layton raise her voice or be visibly angry at his father until the ten weeks before the suicides. In the first

11. Katsaris was one of the young, educated, white women who had joined in the early 1970s. She had had three years of college and was twenty-five years old when she died at Jonestown. She was among the elite inner circle, and her father, Steve, was among the most vociferous opponents of the Temple and a central leader of Concerned Relatives.

incident Carolyn Layton called Stephan Jones to come to the house at Jonestown where Jim Jones lived with Layton, Katsaris, John Victor Stoen, and Kimo Prokes (the child of Layton and Jim Jones) because Jones was screaming at Layton in a Russian accent and accusing her of being a traitor. The Russian accent was not surprising as, according to a variety of sources, Jones believed himself to be the reincarnation of Lenin and would periodically stage "reincarnation" acts with a Russian accent. Reportedly, Carolyn Layton thought she was the reincarnation of Lenin's mistress. What was surprising to Jones was the level of hostility his father was directing toward Layton, screaming at her and accusing her of being a traitor, a counterrevolutionary, and one of the "Czar's minions." Layton was screaming back at Jones. Stephan Jones physically restrained his father until he calmed down. The second conflict occurred shortly thereafter when Jim Jones pointed a revolver at Stephan Jones and threatened to shoot him until Carolyn Layton talked him out of it. Finally, after the defection of Teri Buford in late October 1978, Jim Jones had a "heart attack," which Carolyn Layton, Stephan Jones, and everyone else intimate with Jones knew was a fake. Jones frequently fainted in the face of disloyalty or disagreement. When the family was summoned to Jones's bedside, Stephan Jones remembers looking closely at Layton and observing that she was "very upset, sullen, and stone-faced." While Jones was at his father's bedside, Jim Jones asked for an injection and told his sons it was "just B12." Stephan Jones remembers thinking that they had to "isolate him and get him off the drugs" (S. G. Jones interview 7 Dec. 1992. All three stories were told during the interview).

Layton's demeanor at Jones's bedside indicated her state of mind during the last months in Jonestown. According to Stephan Jones, she was "tired of living, worn out; she felt there was no hope and no future in Jonestown." Further, she was "tired of sharing the man she loved." Jones indicated that it was not only Layton who was unhappy with life at Jonestown, for there was widespread and deep depression among the white leadership during the fall of 1978. As Jones pointed out, "It was a weak place to be psychologically in order to change the world." By November decisions at Jonestown were no longer based on apostolic socialist ideology and the desire to build a model utopian society but on "appeasement and favoritism" (S. G. Jones interview 7 Dec. 1992). Those in leadership spent most of their time addressing the various internal and external crises.

Violence as a Reaction to the Increase in Internal and External Pressure

Although Stephan Jones offers insight into the mindset of Layton and others in positions of leadership, it is difficult to determine how the rank and file members experienced the demands of life at Jonestown. One clue is provided by the answers to another of the exercises given to the entire adult community. It queried, "What I would do if there was a final white night." These answers, unlike many of the others, were typed up by name onto a document that, I surmise, was studied by the leadership circle. Willingness to die fighting for Jonestown or by "revolutionary suicide" or by exacting revenge against the "traitors" was affirmed over and over again by the writers. Of the more than four hundred responses, which include answers from all three "groups" within Peoples Temple, one, in particular, suggests that there were discussions about what should happen to the children if the Jonestown community was forcibly disbanded. Next to this entry "please note" is typed in bold with stars around it. "I would like to just drink some poison or what ever [sic]. I am still concerned about Billy who doesn't say much and is scared to die. He is imature [sic]. If he could be taken care of with the children I would feel free to go and blow myself up with some tratiors [sic]" (CHS, C-5-a-23).

In another assignment—"responses to what one would do with their body for revolution"—a woman with a four-year-old daughter wrote, "This would be hard for me because I don't like to face the fact of killing my own child" (CHS, C-5-a-33). By December 1977, when Debbie Layton Blakey and her mother Lisa moved to Jonestown, suicide was openly spoken of at Peoples Rallies in response to any attempt by the U.S. or Guyanese governments to remove children forcibly from the community (CHS, C-11-d-11a). In response to a communiqué about delivering the Oliver children to Georgetown the 21 December 1977 minutes read, "Dad refused as always on the principle that we would rather die." At this meeting Jones said that he wanted "those who were afraid to die to be counseled" (CHS, C-11-d-11a). Within five months the conditions at Jonestown and the relentless talk of suicide would prove too much for Blakey, and she would return to the United States, warning that Jim Jones and his followers were planning mass suicide. In the wake of her allegations Jonestown residents were reminded, among the "do's and don'ts" when visitors came, that "we don't believe in suicide" (CHS, C-11-d-1b).

The custody battle over John Victor Stoen became a focus of Jonestown security concerns and the issue around which talk of violence and suicide crystallized.¹² In August 1977 Grace Stoen was granted custody of her son by a California court. The residents of Jonestown responded by ripping up the summons served on Jones (Hall 1987, 217–18). A prolonged legal battle followed that was finally resolved only by John Victor's death on 18 November 1978. The significance of John Victor's custody grew as the perceived danger to the community at Jonestown increased. He became a representation of the community itself, not least because he was widely acknowledged as the child of Jones and was being raised as a future leader. Hall comments:

For Peoples Temple, the issues involved politics and precedent. Whatever the claims to biological or legal paternity, John Stoen had been raised communally for more than half his life. . . . Like other communal groups, Peoples Temple altered the social claims of biological parenthood. The communal logic held that John Stoen's family was the group of people who raised him, and that he had a right to a destiny in the world where he was growing up. (1987, 222)

In an undated letter written "to whom it may concern" in the Guyanese government Carolyn Layton attempted to clarify the seriousness of the Stoen custody case.

Pragmatically the issue of John Stoen is not an isolated custody case to us. From the political perspective we know that if we do not get backing on this issue, how could we ever have confidence in the government backing us on far more controversial issues. We also know that if John Stoen were taken from the collective, it would be number one in a series of similar attempts. It was indeed a precedent which if successful would give many others courage to make similar attempts. It was very much for the good of the collective that we decided as a group to make a stand on the John Stoen issue. (CHS X-3-b-2a/2b)

Later in the letter Layton indicates how far this stand might take Peoples Temple.

12. I explore the shift from protecting the children from custody claims to being willing to murder them rather than allow their return to the United States more fully in chapter 7.

One final factor to keep in mind was that a government official very high up told us when the John Stoen case first came up that we would just have to follow the process and that they could do nothing for us. He also said that Jim might just have to sacrifice John in the long run. This fact along with all the other events which followed added to our final resolve that we had to bring the case to the attention of all, and make a commitment on it, if the future security of the group was to be maintained. . . . *When we made our resolve we had no idea at all what the outcome would be, so we genuinely felt our resolve could easily end up in violence or death.* (CHS, X-3-b-2a/2b; italics added)

It is difficult to know if the black church members at Jonestown felt as strongly about the John Victor Stoen case as those who were closest to Jones or if their opinion about this or other central issues was taken into consideration. Stephan Jones stated that the Peoples Temple of California was different from the Peoples Temple of Jonestown and that this was especially apparent with regard to the status of black members. As Jones pointed out, "Blacks were second class in society, then made first class in Peoples Temple. When we moved to Jonestown, they became second class again." He said this was because the "white elite" who surrounded Jones were protective of their power and were unwilling to share it with the rank and file members who were mostly black (S. G. Jones interview, 11 Dec. 1992). In addition, a more complex racism was at work at Jonestown that relates to the connections between sex and power in Peoples Temple, specifically power linked to intimacy with Jim Jones. Jim Jones was uncomfortable with having sexual intimacy with black women because he believed in the "myths" about their sexuality. In the words of his son Jones was afraid of their "aggressive, almost animal-like sexual appetites." He was certain that he would be shown to be "sexually inadequate" if he had sex with the black women in Peoples Temple (S. G. Jones interview, 11 Dec. 1992).

Authors who have written on Peoples Temple have come to their own conclusions as to the reason why people went along with Jones in committing suicide. All agree that Jones was at the heart of the decision; their disagreements flow from different understandings about why the others went along with him. Rose argues that members of Peoples Temple were eventually compromised through Jones's combination of Herculean conscience and aggressive behavior. "He gave to people lacking a sense of inner authority a feeling that they were

'strong,' maybe even 'heroic.' He put them through 'tests'; he wanted to make them 'better people,' worthy of 'the cause' " (Rose 1979, 48).

A strong sense of heroism developed at Jonestown among the members based in part on the perceived (and actual) persecution by the Concerned Relatives and in part on the considerable accomplishment of having built a socialist community in the Guyanese jungle. This, in combination with Jones's increasing incapacitation, sowed the seeds for the shift to take place in which loyalty to Jones was left behind in favor of loyalty to the movement. As the reality of life at Jonestown became more painful, the community's significance as a symbol may have increased. Rose argues that "in the end, perhaps, Jones was partly or wholly stripped of the authority he had held so shakily. He had to rely on sheer power and substantial deception to carry out the final exercise" (Rose 1979, 46). Although I agree that Jones's authority had substantially unraveled by November 1978, it is only necessary to think that, therefore, "power and substantial deception" were necessary if one is wedded to the idea that Jones was by himself the final decision maker and most authoritative supporter of the decision to commit suicide.

Edgar Mills addresses the oft-asked question whether Peoples Temple had within its structure a propensity for violence. He has suggested that there is a variable in the potential for violence between sects and cults. He argues that the potential for "supercommitment, for unquestioning obedience" exists more strongly in cults because of an absence of a "natural damping process" that exists in sects because they are "rooted in longstanding traditions which themselves contain normative dissonance and serve to define norms and values that effectively damp tendencies to extreme behavior" (Levi 1982, 86). These "norms and values" may have amounted to a memory of what Peoples Temple had been in Indiana and how it had changed in moving to California and changed again in moving to Guyana. It is important to note, however, that this memory of what had been—this "normative dissonance"—only caused two family groups, the Parks and the Bogues, to leave with Congressman Ryan on 18 November 1978.

In spite of what Mills argues it must be pointed out that most of the sect members who were part of the Jonestown community chose to die with the cult and urban church members when "supercommitment" was asked of them. In the case of the Parks' and Bogues' families their commitment to one another as family units—perhaps solidified by the decision to move first to California and then to Guyana—

probably provided more of a “natural damping process” than any “norms and values” retained from their sectarian beginnings. There is also the problem, using Mills’s analysis, in explaining why Debbie Layton Blakey and Teri Buford, certainly examples of more typical cult members, left rather than stayed to perform the final act of “unquestioning obedience.” A careful reading of the transcript of the suicide meeting (see app. B) demonstrates that it would be more accurate to call what happened on 18 November “questioning” rather than “unquestioning” obedience. Christine Miller, an urban church member, challenged and questioned the decision that was being made yet, in the end, took the poison.

The fundamental error on the part of those who opposed Peoples Temple was to credit Jim Jones with all the power in the organization. Many accusations against Jones were made by the Concerned Relatives, mostly through the media, and a number of responses were written by Peoples Temple members in defense of their community. One, written by Jonestown resident Pam Moton in March 1978, was sent to both houses of Congress and closed dramatically with, “I can say without hesitation that we are devoted to a decision that it is better even to die than to be constantly harassed from one continent to the next” (Reiterman 1982, 409). This fueled a public protest by the Concerned Relatives, who capitalized on Moton’s letter and accused the Temple of “human rights violations,” including censored mail and armed guards that prevented freedom of access to the community (Hall 1987, 229). The Concerned Relatives believed that Jim Jones held all the power in Peoples Temple and that he needed to be forced through the courts or the U.S. government to relinquish control. They used the media in an attempt to sway public opinion in their direction. Their tactic was effective in eventually soliciting the involvement of Congressman Leo Ryan. Unfortunately, Tim Stoen and the others in opposition had failed to take into account the ways in which Jones’s power and status had shifted since the relocation to Jonestown. As Rebecca Moore wrote with regard to her analysis of the public correspondence between the Concerned Relatives and Moton,

The Relatives’ error in the case of Pam Moton’s letter revealed their assumption that Jim controlled every aspect of life in Jonestown and supervised every detail in the community. Our own experience with Peoples Temple before and after the move to Guyana suggests that Jim’s authority actually declined in the jungle. John noticed on his

visit [in May 1978] that Jim-worship, while not eliminated, was not as pronounced as it had been in San Francisco. Carolyn's and Ann's letters from Guyana talked less of Jim and more of the work of the community. (Moore 1985, 257–58)

Could the tragedy have been avoided if Congressman Ryan had delayed his visit until after the first of the year? The evidence I have collected suggests that Jones would have either stepped down, been eased out, or died within several months. Had this occurred there might have been a mitigation of stress for the inner circle and an infusion of hope into the community as a whole. Probably, the number of residents at Jonestown would have decreased as those who were there only out of loyalty to Jones or who were unhappy with the new leadership left. Perhaps this relief would have led to less rigid boundaries between the people of Jonestown and their loved ones back in the States. But this is all conjecture, for Congressman Ryan did arrive at Jonestown with the Temple's two worst enemies in his entourage: the Concerned Relatives and the media. The result was murder and suicide.