

Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?

Rebecca Moore

The popular understanding of what happened in Jonestown, Guyana on 18 November 1978 has not changed significantly in two decades. The basic details remain the same: a group of Peoples Temple members assassinated a U.S. Congressman and members of the media on a remote jungle airstrip, and more than 900 followers of a charismatic leader named Jim Jones died in a mass murder/suicide ritual. These facts make up the essential canon of Jonestown.¹

Certainly, news coverage in 1998 of the twentieth anniversary of the deaths did little to alter, question, or update the popular version of events. The attempt by a group of scholars to secure the release of secret government documents about Peoples Temple was one of the few notable exceptions to newspaper and TV reports, which, while extensive, seem almost exclusively drawn from archives. Astonishingly or not, two decades of scholarly reflection upon the events of that day seemed to have had little impact on conventional wisdom about Jonestown or Peoples Temple. In effect the canon concerning Jonestown is closed. A publicly-accepted history of Jonestown exists which appears almost unalterable in its persistence. This poses a serious problem for historians and other researchers who may not consider the canon quite as fixed as the public does and who are, indeed, still in the process of recovering and writing the historical record.

The loss of institutional memory about Peoples Temple complicates the process of recovery and, thus, of establishing a canon. The death of Dr. Chris Hatcher in February 1999 poses a tremendous loss for those studying Jonestown. Then-San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein appointed Hatcher to head the crisis intervention team that dealt with the deaths in Jonestown and the assassinations of Mayor George Moscone and Harvey Milk. In the twenty years following his appointment, Hatcher counseled Temple members who returned from Guyana and the relatives of Jonestown victims, wrote articles on the topic, and regularly participated in the yearly service held in memory of the people who died in Jonestown.² Others with personal knowledge about Peoples Temple who have also died in the past two decades include: Jones'

personal physician Dr. Carlton Goodlett; Temple lawyer Charles Garry; U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission in Guyana Richard Dwyer; Temple member Paula Adams and Guyana's ambassador to the U.S. Laurence Mann; two prime ministers of Guyana, Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan; and Al and Jeannie Mills, who founded the Human Freedom Center and helped start the Concerned Relatives. This list, of course, excludes those who could tell us best about life in Jonestown, the 913 who died there, although their views live on to a certain extent in letters, journals, and notes.

Further complicating the historical recovery process is the loss of yet another type of institutional memory: government documents. A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed by myself and Fielding M. McGehee III with the Social Security Administration in 1998 to obtain SSA records of recipients living in Jonestown in November 1978 revealed that the agency had destroyed those papers. Responding to a still-pending FOIA request with the Federal Communications Commission for records of the agency's investigation of Temple radio communications, a caseworker warned that those items may no longer exist.³ FOIA workers at the Federal Bureau of Investigation were puzzled when we referred to the agency's "Guyana Index" to the Temple's own records gathered at Jonestown: they were unfamiliar with this guide, which a previous generation of workers had developed in 1979 to assist the FBI in processing FOIA requests.⁴

In the meantime, research on Peoples Temple has continued in the ten years since Thomas Robbins evaluated the literature in 1989, although at a much-reduced level.⁵ While the public and the news media tend to see alternative religions as self-contained units oblivious to external pressures, a number of writers began to evaluate the impact that government, apostate groups, and news media had on Peoples Temple. The government handling of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas in 1993 graphically demonstrated the role that hostile and powerful opponents of religious groups may play. These developments influenced academic evaluations of Peoples Temple and revised scholarly considerations of Jonestown.

The question of canon—that is, whether we have a complete accounting as well as an accepted historical narrative—emerged as I attempted to survey Peoples Temple literature of the past decade, picking up where Robbins left off in 1989. My examination indicates that a wide gap exists between popular literature and scholarly analyses. Standard accounts continue to promote the deranged leader/brainwashed follower paradigm and to shape the prevailing understanding of Jonestown. Moreover, conflicting accounts of what happened in the first weeks after the tragedy, coupled with the failure of federal agencies to release classified information on the organization, gave rise to a body of

conspiracy theories which provides alternatives to both popular and scholarly explanations of what happened.

A popular canon thus appears to dominate common knowledge of Peoples Temple and Jonestown. This canon seems impervious to critique either by scholarly analysts or conspiracy theorists. Its strength rests on the lack of consensus among its critics. This paper shows just how wide the disagreements are within and between these two groups of challengers. The general understanding of Peoples Temple that was more or less fixed within a year of the deaths in Jonestown therefore comprises the canon on Jonestown today. Whether or not this canon is complete or in need of revision is another question.

THE POPULAR CANON

News coverage at the twentieth anniversary clearly presented the current canon of Jonestown. Television news re-ran video and photographs of the death scene as well as of Congressman Leo Ryan's visit to Jonestown on 17 and 18 November 1978. The poison vat and pictures of bodies served as icons of the danger of cults. News stories in California focused on first-person accounts, such as several by Tim Reiterman, who had accompanied Ryan to Jonestown, and John Jacobs, who together with Reiterman wrote *Raven*.⁶ The *San Francisco Examiner* ran a three-part series, the first of which asked what we have learned.⁷ An article in the 13 November 1998 *San Francisco Chronicle* did attempt to articulate the present divide between cult "apologists" and "alarmists," quoting J. Gordon Melton and Margaret Singer.⁸ The *Chronicle* and the website for Cable News Network (CNN) reported on efforts to declassify government papers on Jonestown.⁹ But CNN also ran photos of corpses and the poison vat, and claimed that "some were shot to death by the armed guards ringing the camp." The fact is, only two people were shot to death in Jonestown (as opposed to five at the Port Kaituma airstrip), according to Guyana's assistant Police Commissioner for Crime.

ABC's *20/20* aired an hour-long program with Jim Jones' sons Stephan and Jim Jones, Jr., which seemed to humanize the people who died and not to demonize them. And yet, the program ended on an ominous note, when Jackie Speier, Ryan's aide who was wounded at the Port Kaituma airstrip, said, "No one should ever be so arrogant as to think that it can't happen to them. We're all susceptible on one level or another."¹⁰ Barbara Walters followed Speier's comments by drawing parallels between Jonestown and the deaths of the Branch Davidians and members of Heaven's Gate, saying it was ironic that they were all looking for a better, more peaceful world. Diane Sawyer summed up by noting that, "It's what makes cult activity so pernicious—that you're really

preying on people's best instincts, their desire for spirituality and for community. And I guess it leaves all of us just fearing, but knowing, that some day it will probably happen again."¹¹

Deborah Layton's account of her experiences in Peoples Temple, *Seductive Poison*, received extensive coverage because its publication coincided with the twentieth anniversary.¹² Layton presented her experiences and memories of twenty years earlier, admitting in a prefatory note that all of her conversations with Jim Jones in the book were re-created from memory and "from hours of tape recordings my brother, Dr. Thomas N. Layton, made of me immediately after my escape [in May 1978]." In other words, *Seductive Poison* is based on much of the same source material as Thomas Layton's 1981 book *In My Father's House*.¹³ The foreword by Charles Krause, a reporter who accompanied Ryan to Jonestown and who wrote of his experiences in *Guyana Massacre: The Eyewitness Account*, also failed to incorporate any new insights gained since 1978, as he repeated what he wrote twenty years earlier.¹⁴

Deborah Layton's book both reveals and disappoints. She confirms Mary McCormick Maaga's assertion that women essentially ran and operated Peoples Temple, especially its financial management (see below). Whereas Maaga concludes that Jones *lost* power in the move to Jonestown, though, Layton claims that he *gained* more power and authority than when the Temple was in San Francisco.

Most disappointing is Layton's failure to discuss adequately her involvement with the Concerned Relatives, an apostate group actively organized against Jones. Layton devotes only eighteen pages in a 305-page book to her contacts with the Concerned Relatives and with Leo Ryan. The book could have offered the first insider account of this apostate group and provided a truly original and valuable contribution to our understanding of Peoples Temple and its opponents, but Layton squanders the opportunity.

Other popular accounts have appeared since 1989 which reflect the canon about Jonestown established shortly after November 1978. James Boyle's book *Killer Cults*, published by St. Martin's Press True Crime Library, follows a chapter on Charles Manson with one on Jim Jones.¹⁵ "Dad Knows Best" clearly derives from narratives published within a few years and, in some cases, a few weeks of 18 November 1978.¹⁶ Aside from historical inaccuracies, Boyle's article takes a flamboyant and titillating tone. For example: "Jonestown was in fact a plantation ruled by Jones and his white aides, with the black majority in the field all day under tropical heat, carefully supervised by guards who took notes of attitudes and comments."¹⁷ It took one hundred guards whose "thuglike members wielded power like a banana-republic goon squad" to control the remaining drugged and dispirited population.

Robert Endleman also makes the link between Charles Manson and Jim Jones—one noted as early as 1978—in *Jonestown and the Manson*

Family: Race, Sexuality and Collective Madness.¹⁸ Endleman says that *The Cult That Died*, by George Klineman (1980) and *Our Father Who Art In Hell*, by James Reston, Jr. (1981) were his primary sources.¹⁹ The author really focuses on Jones and Manson, rather than on the dynamics of the groups. He occasionally makes an astute observation, such as “[e]ach of these movements tapped into the great and still unresolved American dilemma of race.”²⁰ In fact, the title suggests an interesting discussion of sexuality and race in these two movements. Unfortunately, the book proves to be repetitive and derivative.²¹

Perhaps the best indicator of the canon of Jonestown comes from *Britannica.com*, the online edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The entry for Jonestown is brief enough to present in its entirety:

Jonestown former site of the People’s [sic] Temple commune in northwestern Guyana, near the Venezuelan border. A religious cult group, the commune ended in 1978 when the cult’s founder and leader, **Jim Jones**, initiated a mass suicide in which 913 people died. [Punctuation, spelling, and typography as in original.]²²

A much longer entry appears under “Jones, Jim,” which gives more details about the history of Peoples Temple and the events of 18 November 1978. A few brief passages reveal the tone and tenor of the article:

[Jones, Jim,] American cult leader who promised his followers a utopia in the jungles of South America after proclaiming himself messiah of the People’s [sic] Temple, a San Francisco-based evangelist group. He ultimately led his followers into a mass suicide, which came to be known as the Jonestown Massacre (Nov. 18, 1978).

The paragraph above appears as the initial reference within *Britannica.com* itself (as opposed to other websites) under the search heading “People’s [sic] Temple.” By clicking on “Jones” one accesses the complete article. A few excerpts follow.

As ruler of the sect, Jones confiscated passports and millions of dollars and manipulated his followers with threats of blackmail, beatings, and probably death. He also staged bizarre rehearsals for a ritual mass suicide.

On November 18, [Jones] commanded his followers to drink cyanide-adulterated punch, an order that the vast majority of them passively and inexplicably obeyed. [Punctuation and spelling as in original.]²³

One sees little evidence of scholarly language, let alone scholarly distance, concerning a contemporary new religious movement. Yet the information *Britannica.com* presents on Jim Jones and Peoples Temple succinctly sums up how most people view them.²⁴ Most importantly, the

Encyclopaedia Britannica articles provide the foundation for what school children will read and think about Peoples Temple in particular, and about alternative religions or “doomsday cults” in general.²⁵

John R. Hall’s essay “Peoples Temple,” which appears in the college textbook, *America’s Alternative Religions*, provides a salutary antidote to the articles on *Britannica.com*.²⁶ I include it in the popular canon simply because it is likely to have a wider audience than most scholarly writings on Peoples Temple. As in his monograph *Gone from the Promised Land*, Hall’s concern here is with what cultural significance Peoples Temple and Jonestown have for American life. In this essay for students, he identifies race, secularism, left-liberal politics, and social ethics as the significant intersection between Peoples Temple and American cultural issues. He also finds historical parallels between Peoples Temple and the Puritans and Mormons—groups which experienced conflict with the established order and migrated as a result. Hall describes the deaths in Jonestown as murders and mass suicides, arguing that the majority of people died more or less willingly, although he does admit that “the question will always be open to debate.” He concludes by speculating on the United States government’s role either in failing to prevent the deaths or in propelling them, and observes that opening government files might lead to a reassessment of the history of Peoples Temple.

Hall has confidence that Jonestown scholarship has replaced popular myths about Peoples Temple. For example, he believes that while Congressman Ryan, the Concerned Relatives and journalists were once considered heroes, it is clear now “that their own actions were consequential in affecting the course of events.”²⁷ I am not as sanguine about the triumph of scholarship—or even his conclusions about popular perceptions of Ryan and the media—given the nature of the literature reviewed for this paper.

THE SCHOLARLY CRITIQUE: THE THIRD WAVE OF JONESTOWN RESEARCH

Thomas Robbins identified a first wave of Jonestown literature as comprising a short monograph, a reader, and “a handful of articles dealing specifically with the Peoples Temple and its spectacular holocaust.”²⁸ The second wave he discussed included *Salvation and Suicide* by David Chidester and *Gone from the Promised Land* by John R. Hall.²⁹

Two main trends have emerged in research concerning Peoples Temple since Robbins wrote his review. The first is a tendency toward comparative studies which look at the Temple in light of apocalyptic, millennial, or suicidal religious groups such as the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, and the Solar Temple. The second is a tendency to examine marginalized groups—specifically women and African

Americans—ignored in the first and second waves of Jonestown studies. I would therefore like to describe a third wave of comparative and ethnic-gender studies about Peoples Temple and Jonestown which extends and revises the existing scholarly challenge to the popular canon.

Comparative Studies

The tragic end of the Branch Davidians near Waco, Texas on 19 April 1993 fueled a number of comparative studies between the group and Peoples Temple, as well as comparisons among a number of different groups which used violence or ended violently. In *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*, Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony contrast the Branch Davidians with Peoples Temple. They say that the Davidians responded to external provocation, “whereas at Jonestown, the mere visitation of an unarmed congressperson and his party, who were about to return to the United States with a handful of voluntary defectors, produced a murderous assault on the visitors followed by an orgy of murder-suicide among more than 900 persons.”³⁰ In an essay for Stuart Wright’s book *Armageddon at Waco*, Robbins and Anthony identify two factors which may make a religious group prone to violence: exogenous (external) and endogenous (internal).³¹ They claim that primarily endogenous factors within Peoples Temple led to its dramatic and violent end.³² In other articles Robbins reiterates his argument that Peoples Temple overreacted to a minor provocation.³³

The view that primarily endogenous factors influenced the actions of members of Peoples Temple ignores the existence of a bitter conflict between Peoples Temple and its enemies. Leo Ryan’s visit was not the beginning but rather the culmination of this battle.³⁴ As John Hall and Philip Schuyler write in an essay for David Bromley’s book *The Politics of Religious Apostasy*, leadership in Jonestown unleashed the murders and suicides “in response to a two-year struggle against Peoples Temple mounted by its cultural opponents, a group that called themselves the Concerned Relatives.”³⁵ And later in the same essay: “Given the targets, the attack itself has to be understood as an extreme escalation of an intense conflict between the Concerned Relatives and Peoples Temple.”³⁶

In *Apocalypse Observed*, Hall, Schuyler, and Sylvaine Trinh continue to develop the arguments begun in Hall and Schuyler’s essay by presenting a sociohistorical model based on a thesis of apocalyptic religious conflict to explain extreme religious violence.³⁷ Extreme collective religious violence is the product of the interaction between religious movements and opponents in the outside world, they assert. The case studies they examine—Peoples Temple, Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, Solar Temple, and Heaven’s Gate—show that collective violence does not arise solely on the basis of internal dynamics. On the

contrary, apocalyptic episodes must be viewed in light of the established social orders in which they arise. When external conflict seems absent (as in the cases of Heaven's Gate and Solar Temple), alternative apocalyptic "scripts" come into play. Nevertheless, even the "mystical apocalypse of deathly transcendence" (the script for Heaven's Gate and Solar Temple) as opposed to the "warring apocalypse of religious conflict" (the script for Peoples Temple, Branch Davidians, and Aum Shinrikyo) cannot be seen apart from their cultural contexts.

In their analysis of Jonestown, the authors claim that internal features serve as necessary preconditions to violence, but they are insufficient alone to trigger large scale violence. Additional causal factors are needed, such as large-scale cultural opponents, a media biased against "cults," and the exercise of state authority.³⁸ This thesis follows Hall's argument in *Gone from the Promised Land* that the alliance of cultural opponents, especially apostates, the media, and the government, led inexorably to the deaths in Jonestown. The Jonestown myth, the authors say in this new book, depends on the belief that the carnage was solely a consequence of the acts of Jim Jones and his accomplices. Shattering that myth, the authors state that:

[I]t seems incontrovertible that the expedition of Congressman Ryan, the Concerned Relatives and journalists, and especially the departure of sixteen Jonestown residents, was the precipitating factor in the murderous attack. As a specific event, the mass suicide must be seen as a consequence of the expedition.³⁹

While Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh use the category of "apocalypse" to ground their analytical model, Catherine Wessinger uses the category of "millennialism" in her comparative study of Peoples Temple and other religious groups that have used violence. *How the Millennium Comes Violently* seems to take a middle position between Robbins and Anthony, and Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh.⁴⁰ The book states that both internal and external pressures push "fragile millennial groups" over the edge. Wessinger differentiates between fragile millennial groups, which include Peoples Temple, Aum Shinrikyo, and Heaven's Gate, and assaulted millennial groups, which include the Branch Davidians. Fragile groups initiate violence in the face of the potential loss of their millennial goals or in the face of perceived attacks, while assaulted groups may respond with violence to actual physical invasions.

Wessinger's methodology proves useful in identifying similarities and differences between various movements and their ideologies. For example, she places Peoples Temple, Aum Shinrikyo, the Branch Davidians and the Montana Freeman in the category of catastrophic millennialist groups because they all have an inherently dualistic worldview in which the world serves as a battleground between good and evil. Wessinger goes further, however, and pairs Peoples Temple

and Aum Shinrikyo as fragile millennial groups because they turned to the use of violence in order to preserve their millennial goals. The Branch Davidians, on the other hand, never despaired of reaching their goals. On the contrary, the actions of law enforcement confirmed their expectations.

Wessinger's model may overstate differences and obscure similarities, however. I wonder about pairing Peoples Temple with Aum Shinrikyo. It seems to me that in some respects Aum Shinrikyo belongs with the Freemen and Christian Identity rather than with Peoples Temple because those groups are arming themselves to resist government oppression and to promote revolution (or the millennium). In other words, their violence is directed outward. Except for the brief outburst against Congressman Ryan and his party, Peoples Temple's violence was always internally directed. It had no arsenal, no automatic weapons, no sarin gas, no bunkers.

Three additional books provide a comparative analysis of Peoples Temple. Two Italian scholars examine the politics of Peoples Temple in separate books. Massimo Introvigne's comparison of Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, and the Solar Temple shows that the Temple's affiliation with a mainline church, coupled with its interest in Marxism, make it atypical of "cults."⁴¹ This means that using Jonestown as the paradigm of cult excess is somewhat paradoxical. Enrico Pozzi, a political and military sociologist, obtained a number of FOIA documents for his study of the Temple in order to see if its peculiar brand of Marxism might have played a role in the formation of its ideology of revolutionary suicide.⁴² Finally, David Bromley and J. Gordon Melton have a book on *Dramatic Confrontations* due out in 2001 that should contribute to the trend in comparative studies.⁴³

Ethnic and Gender Studies

In addition to making comparative studies of Peoples Temple, researchers are beginning to explore the roles of women and African Americans in Peoples Temple. With some prescience, Archie Smith wrote in 1978, before Jonestown, that "[w]ith few exceptions, white scholars of the 'New Religious Consciousness' have failed, so far, to perceive racism as a significant factor worthy of their attention in the study of the new religious movements."⁴⁴ This held true for almost twenty years concerning Peoples Temple, with the exceptions of Smith, Vincent Harding, and C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya.⁴⁵ Lincoln and Mamiya identified Peoples Temple as a "political religion" but seemed to take umbrage that the media identified Peoples Temple as a black phenomenon in spite of its white leadership. That umbrage has dissipated with time as scholars have finally begun to locate Peoples Temple within the context of black religion. One can see this in Timothy

Miller's textbook, where he places Peoples Temple alongside the Nation of Islam, Santería, Voudou, and Father Divine's Peace Mission.⁴⁶

Two articles on African American involvement in Peoples Temple appeared in 1998 on the website I maintain for Jonestown research: <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~remoore/jonestown>>. In the first, Archie Smith addresses the criticism of the black church implicit in the defection of African Americans to Peoples Temple.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, modern secularism—which trivializes the religious impulse—dominated the ideology of Temple leaders, which led to a false consciousness that blinded members to the racism, sexism, and ageism at work in Peoples Temple. Smith finds this ironic, given the fact that people believed they had found a community of freedom and equality. Part of the problem, though, came from what Smith calls “audience corruption,” the process by which both the group leader and the followers construct a social reality together. “Jones could not have orchestrated the idea of his deification without the support of his followers. Jones, too, was a victim of his ego deification process.”⁴⁸

Smith devotes the second half of his article to discussing the alternative to secularism, which he identifies as “relationality,” and the implications his analysis has for the black church. “Relationality is a way of speaking about the interdependent, yet dialectical and constituent character of Black communal life as a whole,” he writes.⁴⁹ Blacks joined Peoples Temple as an alternative to the insularity they experienced in black church worship. But lacking in the relational and self-critical dimensions, they were unable to discern Jones' false claims. Smith concludes by saying that Jonestown is not an anomaly but rather a product of the ethos of our time, “an ethos that tends to repress and trivialize the essentially religious impulse.”⁵⁰ That ethos has not changed much in the last twenty years.

The second article published in 1998 concerning African Americans in Peoples Temple came from Mary Sawyer, who has been studying the black church in the Temple for several years.⁵¹ She briefly examines the failure of early scholarly and journalistic reports to address the significant African American composition of the movement. She argues that the black majority membership of Peoples Temple retained traditional Christian beliefs: faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, confidence in God's liberative activities in history, and support for an activist social gospel. “It was this public modeling of ‘church’ that gained so much support for the Temple from government officials, church officials, the black press, and individuals like myself.”⁵² “They knew,” she writes, “for all of their leader's deceit and heresy, that Jim Jones spoke a truth, and that truth was that America's ‘self-evident’ principles were not evident in practice.”⁵³

While Smith and Sawyer focus on the black church within Peoples Temple, Mary McCormick Maaga examines the role of women,

particularly the white leadership group.⁵⁴ In her book, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown*, she deconstructs traditional theoretical frameworks which describe women in new religious movements and concludes that “what one ‘knows’ about Peoples Temple and what happened at Jonestown on 18 November 1978 has more to do with the ideological schema being used by sociologists than with the lived experience of the people who were actually there.”⁵⁵ She writes of the “triple erasure” of women in particular, due to their allegedly being 1) brainwashed cultists, 2) sexually-exploited women, and 3) suicide victims, and challenges the idea that Jim Jones held all the power in the movement. On the contrary, she argues, once the group moved to Guyana, power shifted from Jones to the leadership group, comprised predominantly of women, and loyalty was transferred from Jones to the Jonestown community. Women received the utilitarian benefits of achieving status, serving as gatekeepers, and influencing policy decisions by having sex with Jones. Women had more power in Peoples Temple than their gender, experience, or training would have allowed outside the movement.

In her study of the role of African Americans in the group, Maaga says that their status did not match that of white females. Although blacks did achieve some parity in the Indiana and California years of the Temple, the leadership group in Guyana was overwhelmingly white. The black rank and file actually returned to the subordinate position it held in American society. Nonetheless, blacks surpassed whites in their loyalty and commitment, Maaga argues, as evidenced by the fact that the high-profile apostates were for the most part white, as was the group which defected with Leo Ryan on 18 November 1978.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Maaga’s study is her re-working of Ernst Troelstch’s church-sect-cult typology. She identifies “three groups in one:” an urban black church within Peoples Temple; a small white sect which migrated from Indianapolis to California in the 1960s; and a cult movement of young, predominantly white political idealists.⁵⁶ Peoples Temple was not just one entity, but rather several which varied in its relatively lengthy history. This identification may help resolve some of the problems scholars have in classifying Peoples Temple.

The fact that Maaga’s work is the only book-length monograph on Peoples Temple to emerge from the United States in the third wave of scholarship seems to indicate that, even for scholars, the canon may be closed. Several areas of research still need investigation, however. An intensive study of African Americans’ participation and involvement in the organization is critically needed, as are comparative studies of Peoples Temple with other African American religious groups, both Christian and alternative. Lincoln and Mamiya, and Reiterman and Jacobs briefly examine the connections between Jim Jones and Father Divine, but much more work remains to be done.

In addition, a wealth of unexamined materials might provide new perspectives on life inside Peoples Temple and Jonestown. The California Historical Society has thousands of pages, as does the FBI. Clearly researchers ought to examine these.⁵⁷ In fact, a complete analysis of the role of various governmental agencies—local, state, federal—also would contribute to our understanding of the events at Jonestown. In the absence of such an analysis, a body of conspiracy theories has arisen to challenge the prevailing canon.

THE CHALLENGE OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Within weeks of Jonestown, skeptics questioned official accounts of what had happened. The varying number of bodies proved most suspicious: first 400, then 650, and then within a few days, 900. The arrangement of the bodies also seemed odd: is this how people dying of cyanide poisoning would actually look? Disbelief that people would voluntarily kill themselves also fueled suspicions that things were not as they appeared. The fact that so many African Americans had died raised questions as well. What conspiracy literature attempts to resolve are the very real inconsistencies that exist in the available narratives.

The first book-length exposé of the government conspiracy to conduct mind control experiments on black Americans came out in 1988. In *Was Jonestown a CIA Medical Experiment?* Michael Meiers claims that a Nazi-CIA axis of scientists—including Dr. Laurence Layton, the father of both Temple member Larry Layton who was convicted of conspiracy to murder a congressman and of Deborah Layton who persuaded Congressman Ryan to go to Guyana—tested drugs in Jonestown as part of the CIA's MK-ULTRA program.⁵⁸ While Jim Jones pretended to be a communist, he was actually a registered Republican, “whose ultra-conservative, right-wing politics were reflective of the Ku Klux Klan or the Nazi Party and are best evidenced by the fascist form of his Peoples Temple.”⁵⁹ Meiers links the Peoples Temple experiment to the Symbionese Liberation Army, the assassinations of George Moscone and Harvey Milk, the outbreak of the AIDS virus in the United States, and of course former Nazis from Germany who control the CIA.⁶⁰ Meiers further contends that Jones and his leadership group escaped, and “[t]he Reverend Jim Jones is alive, wealthy, secure and conceivably sipping pina [sic] coladas on the veranda as he reads this first published account of his escape from the carnage he created in Jonestown.”⁶¹

If one wanted to discredit conspiracy theories, Meiers' book would do it. There are factual inaccuracies, wild leaps to conclusions, and gratuitous speculations. It is sparsely footnoted, with even a few notes saying “Pending,” indicating that the citation had not yet been located or verified. But Meiers attempts to address several legitimate questions

with his book, particularly the reason for the tremendous supply of psychotropic drugs found in Jonestown. Jones' strange political connections, his trips to Brazil, and his comments about Richard Dwyer, the U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission to Guyana, on the death tape all serve as grist for the conspiracy mill.

Against Meiers, Nathan Landau asserts in the book *Heavenly Deceptor* that Jonestown was a left-wing conspiracy which sought to bring down the United States by establishing a base of operations in Guyana.⁶² Jim Jones planned to escape using the millions of dollars he had stashed in various banks in the Caribbean and in Europe. Jones' escape plan, called "The Last Stand" according to Landau, was foiled by Teri Buford as well as by his circle of guards.⁶³ Buford double-crossed Jones by involving Mark Lane in the plan to spend the money, since she knew the secret bank account numbers. The guards double-crossed Jones by killing him at the end and escaping.

Heavenly Deceptor contains almost all the elements required for a decent conspiracy theory today: sex, drugs, money, Nazis, torture, the John F. Kennedy assassination, the Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination, Ayatollah Khomeini and the PLO, and Eva Braun.⁶⁴ While the book is ultimately incoherent, it does raise the question of what Jones planned to do with all of the money hidden away and why it was not used to improve conditions in Jonestown. It also poses the race question of why a number of people in the white leadership group escaped at the last minute.⁶⁵ Landau sees the deaths of African Americans as evidence of a racist, perhaps even Nazi, attempt to create a concentration camp in which people were worked to death rather than exterminated.

While Jeff Brailey's self-published account of his experience with the evacuation of the bodies of the Jonestown dead does not fall into the category of conspiracy literature, *The Ghosts of November* is sure to fuel conspiracy theories.⁶⁶ Brailey, a Licensed Practical Nurse, was a U.S. Army Master Sergeant with the 601st Medical Company stationed in Panama which was assigned to participate in the bodylift after 18 November 1978. He derives his account of life in Jonestown primarily from Deborah Layton [Blakey]'s 1978 affidavit which warned of the potential for suicide, but his most interesting anecdotes come from his personal experiences of being stationed in Matthews Ridge, Guyana the week after the deaths.⁶⁷ He recalls "heading toward a place with more dead human bodies scattered about than any other place I had ever been including Vietnam."⁶⁸ Brailey claims that he saw Jim Jones lying dead on the steps of his cabin, not in the pavilion, with his arms in a different position from that of the famous photograph. He also says that a lieutenant from the Guyana Defense Force showed him a cabin in Jonestown with dead Guyanese citizens who had been shot. Brailey returned from his first visit to Jonestown on 20 November in a helicopter with a man claiming to work for the U.S. Embassy in Georgetown. The

official insisted that Brailey shoot anyone who attempted to grab the large crate of papers he had gathered over the previous twenty-four hours. Brailey concludes that the man was a CIA “spook,” or operative.⁶⁹

Brailey attempts to clear up the mystery of the changing body count with an explanation which may or may not satisfy conspiracy theorists. He says that bodies had fallen—from youngest and smallest to oldest and most able-bodied—on top of each other in a depression around the pavilion. In his words, they fell in an “inverted pyramid.”⁷⁰ He provides some useful information about the identification process which might help researchers determine family groupings. He also notes that a Criminal Investigation Division of the Army in Panama looked into charges of theft from Jonestown. This might prove another avenue for research: military investigations and after-action reports that might allay conspiracy talk by accounting for discrepancies that appeared in news coverage of the initial chaos.

Three conspiracy sources take the position that the CIA wanted to disrupt Jonestown because it was a leftist, interracial, political group. A cover story in *Freedom*, the magazine of the Church of Scientology, claims that the CIA was bent on destroying both Peoples Temple and Leo Ryan, who had sponsored legislation to curb CIA abuses.⁷¹ Quoting former Green Beret Charles Huff, the article claims that people in Jonestown did not die willingly. “We saw *many* bullet wounds as well as wounds from crossbow bolts,” he said, adding that adults who had not been shot were injected.⁷² Dr. Leslie Mootoo, chief medical examiner for Guyana in 1978, also reiterated his belief—which he first voiced in 1978—that the majority of people in Jonestown had been murdered, saying that 187 bodies showed signs of injections. Mootoo and his staff did not complete examinations on all of the dead.

The article also states that, “One source told *Freedom* the actual killers had been planted in the Peoples Temple.”⁷³ That source, unidentified in the article, undoubtedly is Laurie Efrein Kahalas, a Peoples Temple loyalist who in 1998 published *Snake Dance*, her own version of events, and who maintains a website at <<http://www.jonestown.com>>.⁷⁴ She writes that the CIA had a contingency plan to exterminate the community. CIA sharpshooters, not Temple members, conducted a professional hit on Leo Ryan and the media in order to eliminate the congressman and to discredit Jim Jones. The community then had little choice but to take their own lives, she argues, quoting Jones from the final tape: “We have no choice now. Either we do it or they do it.”⁷⁵ Kahalas presents the Peoples Temple perspective on events prior to 18 November 1978 faithfully, if uncritically. She goes further, however, and labels any account at variance with her own as “disinformation.” Nevertheless, her book is a valuable look at what Peoples Temple members thought about a major and on-going child custody battle, about the Concerned Relatives, and about Ryan’s visit. Moreover, Kahalas raises

interesting questions about the hit squad which assassinated Ryan and the others: where is NBC's raw, unedited footage of the event, she wonders.

The third and most credible example of leftist conspiracy literature comes from Jim Hougan, a freelance writer and novelist who has documented and footnoted his research investigating alleged connections between Jim Jones and the CIA.⁷⁶ Hougan makes a compelling argument for tying Jones to Dan Mitrione, a CIA agent murdered by Uruguay's Tupamaros in 1970.⁷⁷ He looks closely at Jones' mysterious years in South America between 1960 and 1963, including his trip to Cuba and a trip to Guyana when he supposedly was in Hawaii.⁷⁸ Hougan's most important contribution is his emphasis of the fact that it was the CIA that first described the deaths in Jonestown as mass suicide.⁷⁹ In other words, very early in the reporting the deaths were identified as suicide rather than murder, even though Guyana's chief medical examiner called them murder. Hougan believes that most residents of Jonestown were forcibly injected and therefore were in fact murdered. He bases this belief on the forensic work of Guyana's medical examiner, Dr. Leslie Mootoo, and on the eyewitness account of Stanley Clayton, arguing that these reports are the closest thing we have to an official judgment on the matter. The reason for the murders: Jones wanted to hide the imminent disclosure of his former ties to Mitrione and to U.S. intelligence agencies.

The magnitude of the Jonestown event itself probably means that in some respects no account will ever completely satisfy everyone. In an e-mail message to me Hougan wrote that "if it is in fact the case that the CIA was in some sense 'responsible' for Jim Jones, then the Agency must also have a responsibility—moral and legal—for those who died at Jonestown."⁸⁰ The *Freedom* article concludes by saying that "nearly two decades after the death of Congressman Leo Ryan, America is still owed a definitive explanation for the many unresolved questions surrounding the tragedy."⁸¹ It is clear that conspiracy theorists will continue to spin their tales as long as government documents remain classified.

CONCLUSIONS

Jonestown—as a myth, a word, a concept—has entered common parlance and is visible everywhere. During the threatened strike by major league baseball umpires in August 1999, one umpire said the strike "is like the Jonestown, Koolaid thing. But not everybody was going to be that stupid."⁸² A novel by Wilson Harris is titled *Jonestown*, but has little to do with the original Jonestown,⁸³ nor does Frank Zappa's *Jonestown* album or the group called Jonestown Massacre. An extremely interesting popular analysis of Jonestown appears in Daniel Quinn's novel *My*

Ishmael.⁸⁴ A textbook by Lorne Dawson attempts to present a “sympathetic understanding” of new religious movements, and does look at Peoples Temple in a scholarly way.⁸⁵ But such thoughtful efforts are balanced by throwaway references to Jonestown in popular culture, such as the promotion for an episode of the television program *Law and Order* which compared an abusive father to Jonestown.

A body of scholarly literature has grown upon the foundations laid in the first ten years after Jonestown. That first decade saw instant paperbacks and sensationalistic accounts as well as thoughtful and thorough investigations into the meaning and reality of Peoples Temple. The last decade of the twentieth century viewed Peoples Temple through the lenses of Waco and other violent events involving religious communities, comparing groups, beliefs, and actions. It also examined unexplored facets of life within the Temple, from the perspectives of both women and African Americans. At the same time, however, a canon exists which seems unassailable by scholars attempting to modify, nuance, or enlarge that canon.

Will historians and religion scholars be able to amend the existing Jonestown canon? Right now the odds do not look very good. Although scholars know that we need more information and more research before declaring the canon closed, they appear to have little say in the matter. Moreover, conspiracy theorists may find greater acceptance with the public in the future, just as they have with alternative accounts of the John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinations. I hope that this paper sounds the alarm for the pressing need to communicate scholarly findings with the general public so that one hundred years from now the canon on Jonestown will reflect information and analysis that occurred in the decades after November 1978. I also hope this article points to the urgency of acting quickly to obtain all available documents about Peoples Temple and Jonestown, and to talk with all living witnesses, before they are irretrievably lost. No matter how closed it looks today, the canon on Jonestown remains open as long as government records and first-person accounts are excluded; as long as the stories of African Americans and women are neglected; as long as the role of apostates is ignored; and as long as the questions raised by conspiracy theorists continue to go unanswered. Absent the insights garnered through twenty years of research, the canon by definition must stay open.

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ENDNOTES

¹ One of the many definitions of “canon” is an official list or catalog. I am using the word in that sense to mean the official listing or cataloguing of facts about Jonestown. More broadly, I also take it to mean the publicly-accepted historical record about Peoples Temple. The word “canon” also suggests completeness. For example, the canon of scripture provides the complete or finished list of books in the Bible. This paper considers “canon” in all of these ways.

² In addition to writing books and articles in the fields of child and criminal psychology, Chris Hatcher wrote at least three articles on Peoples Temple: “Cults, Society and Government,” in *New Religious Movements, Mass Suicide, and Peoples Temple: Scholarly Perspectives on a Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Moore and Fielding McGehee III (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 179-95; and “Coercion, Control and Mass Suicide,” and “After Jonestown: Survivors of Peoples Temple,” in *The Need for a Second Look at Jonestown*, ed. Rebecca Moore and Fielding M. McGehee III (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 61-71, 127-46.

³ The documents have since been located. Brian Csuk, an independent investigator, relates an incredible story of the recovery of audiotapes the FCC made of Temple radio traffic. The tapes were found in 1999 in a cardboard box at an FCC monitoring station in Maryland pursuant to Csuk’s Freedom of Information Act request. Csuk has made the FCC audiotapes available at <<http://www.icehouse.net/zodiac/fcc/fccindex.html>> and has posted numerous government documents pertaining to Peoples Temple at <<http://www.icehouse.net/zodiac/index.html>>. These URLs were no longer operational in May 2000.

⁴ In January 2000 we sent FOIA workers at the FBI a copy of the “Guyana Index” from our personal files for their use and information.

⁵ Thomas Robbins, “The Second Wave of Jonestown Literature: A Review Essay,” in Moore and McGehee, *New Religious Movements*, 113-34. The piece is an expansion of his article, “Reconsidering Jonestown,” *Religious Studies Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1989): 32-37.

⁶ Tim Reiterman, “Remembering Jonestown,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 November 1998, A1, A10, A11; idem, “Two decades later: The search for a fitting tribute to Jonestown’s 918 victims,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 November 1998, D11; John Jacobs, “Finding Meaning from Jonestown 20 Years Later,” *Sacramento Bee*, 15 November 1998, Forum 1 and 6; and Tim Reiterman with John Jacobs, *Raven: The Untold Story of the Rev. Jim Jones and His People* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982).

⁷ Larry D. Hatfield, “Days of Darkness,” three-part series, *San Francisco Examiner*, 8, 9, 10 November 1998.

⁸ Don Lattin, “The End to Innocent Acceptance of Sects,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 November 1998, A1, A19.

⁹ Michael Taylor and Don Lattin, “Most Peoples Temple Documents Still Sealed,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 November 1998, A19; and Cable News Network, <<http://cnm.com:80/US/9811/19/jonestown.anniversary.01>>, accessed 18 February 2000.

¹⁰ ABC News, 20/20, “The Tragedy of Jonestown: Jim Jones’ Sons Revisit Site of Mass Suicide,” 18 October 1998, transcript from <http://www.abcnews.com/onair/2020/transcripts/2020_jonestown981018_trans.html>, accessed 18 February 2000.

¹¹ ABC News, 20/20, “The Tragedy of Jonestown.”

¹² Deborah Layton, *Seductive Poison: A Jonestown Survivor’s Story of Life and Death in the Peoples Temple* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998).

¹³ Min S. Yee and Thomas N. Layton, *In My Father’s House: The Story of the Layton Family and the Reverend Jim Jones* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981).

¹⁴ For example, Krause notes that “[w]hat I saw reminded me of a Southern plantation before the Civil War,” which is how he described Jonestown in his initial news accounts. Layton, xviii. See n. 16 for complete citation for *Guyana Massacre*.

- ¹⁵ James J. Boyle, *Killer Cults* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).
- ¹⁶ Boyle is particularly indebted to the following: Ken Wooden, *The Children of Jonestown* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981); Jeannie Mills, *Six Years with God: Life Inside Rev. Jim Jones's Peoples Temple* (New York: A&W Publishers, 1979); and Charles Krause with Laurence M. Stern and Richard Harwood, *Guyana Massacre: The Eyewitness Account* (New York: Hawthorne, 1978).
- ¹⁷ Boyle, 50.
- ¹⁸ Robert Endleman, *Jonestown and the Manson Family: Race, Sexuality and Collective Madness* (New York: Psyche Press, 1993). The reference connecting Charles Manson and Jim Jones appeared in *The Washington Star* newspaper. Rebecca Moore, *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown: The Moore Family Involvement in Peoples Temple* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 9.
- ¹⁹ George Klineman, Sherman Butler, and David Conn, *The Cult That Died: The Tragedy of Jim Jones and the People's Temple* (New York: Putnam's, 1980); James Reston, Jr., *Our Father Who Art in Hell* (New York: Times Books, 1981).
- ²⁰ Endleman, 205.
- ²¹ The Jim Jones-Charles Manson connection also appears in more scholarly works, such as Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "Sects and Violence: Factors Enhancing the Volatility of Marginal Religious Movements," in *Armageddon at Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 249.
- ²² "Jonestown," *Britannica.com*, <<http://search.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/5/0,5716,44965+1,00.html>>, accessed 18 February 2000.
- ²³ "Jones, Jim," *Britannica.com*, <<http://search.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/7/0,5716,44947+1,00.html>>, accessed 18 February 2000.
- ²⁴ Even a longer piece by Martin Marty on "Doomsday Cults" tends to reflect popular attitudes, although Marty does begin by warning readers that scholars try to avoid using the word "cult." "Doomsday Cults," from *Year in Review 1997*, in *Britannica.com*, <<http://search.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/9/0,5716,124419+1,00.html>>, accessed 18 February 2000.
- ²⁵ One personally gratifying note in all this is that the first link *Britannica.com* provides to "The Web's Best Sites" under the heading "People's [sic] Temple" is to "Alternative Considerations of Jonestown and Peoples Temple," <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~remoore/jonestown>>.
- ²⁶ John R. Hall, "Peoples Temple," in *America's Alternative Religions*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 310-11.
- ²⁸ Robbins, "The Second Wave," 114. He specifically includes the following works in the "first wave": Judith Weightman, *Making Sense of the Jonestown Suicides* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983) and Kenneth Levi, ed., *Violence and Religious Commitment: Implications of Jim Jones' Peoples Temple Movement* (University Park, PA: Penn State, 1982). For a complete bibliography see 130-34.
- ²⁹ David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); John R. Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1987).
- ³⁰ Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Exemplary Dualism, and the Waco Tragedy," in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 273.
- ³¹ Robbins and Anthony, "Sects and Violence," 237.
- ³² They rely to a certain extent on Marc Galanter's discussion of boundary preservation in *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113-18.
- ³³ Thomas Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence: A Friendly Critique of the

Interpretive Approach," *Nova Religio: Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 1, no. 1 (October 1997): 13-29; and Thomas Robbins and Susan Palmer, "Patterns of Contemporary Apocalypticism," in Robbins and Palmer, *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*, 17.

³⁴ See Rebecca Moore, "'American as Cherry Pie': Peoples Temple and Violence in America," in *Millennialism, Persecution and Violence: Historical Cases*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 121-37. Hall's book *Gone from the Promised Land* also details the conflict, 210-53.

³⁵ John R. Hall and Philip Schuyler, "Apostasy, Apocalypse, and Religious Violence: An Exploratory Comparison of Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians, and the Solar Temple," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David Bromley (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 146.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁷ John R. Hall with Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe and Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). Hall and Schuyler's earlier essay served as a "working paper" for this longer work.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁰ Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000). An earlier version of a chapter from the book can be seen at: <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~remoore/jonestown/jt1978.html>>. See also an abbreviated version of her argument, "How the Millennium Comes Violently: A Comparison of Jonestown, Aum Shinrikyo, Branch Davidians, and the Montana Freemen," *Dialog* 36, no. 4 (Fall 1997):277-88, which also appears at <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~remoore/jonestown/millennium.html>>.

⁴¹ Massimo Introvigne, *Idee che uccidono. Jonestown, Waco, il Tempio Solare* (Milan: Pessano MIMEP-Docete, 1995).

⁴² Enrico Pozzi, *Il carisma malato. Il People's Temple e il suicidio collettivo di Jonestown* (Naples: Liguori, 1992).

⁴³ David Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, eds., *Dramatic Confrontations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Archie Smith, Jr., "Black Reflections on the Study of New Religious Consciousness," in *Understanding the New Religions*, ed. Jacob Needleman and George Baker (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 210.

⁴⁵ Archie Smith, Jr., "An Interpretation of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown: Implications for the Black Church," *PSR Bulletin Occasional Paper* 58, no. 2 (February 1980), and *idem*, *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), Chapter VIII, "An Interpretation of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown: Implications for the Black Church," 187-31; Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, and Atlanta: Institute of the Black World, 1980), 222-24; and C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, "Daddy Jones and Father Divine: The Cult as Political Religion," *Religious Life* 49 (1980):6-23.

⁴⁶ Timothy Miller, ed., *America's Alternative Religions* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).

⁴⁷ Archie Smith, Jr., "We Need to Press Forward: Black Religion and Jonestown, Twenty Years Later," <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~remoore/jonestown/SMITH.htm>>, accessed 18 February 2000. The substance of this article reiterates and elaborates upon Smith's earlier writings.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵¹ Mary Sawyer, "My Lord, What a Mourning: Twenty Years Since Jonestown," <<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~remoore/jonestown/SAWYER.htm>>, accessed 18 February 2000.

⁵² Ibid., 3.

⁵³ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁴ Mary McCormick Maaga, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998). This is a revision of her dissertation, "Triple Erasure: Women and Power in Peoples Temple," Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1996.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Chapter Five, "Three Groups in One," 74-86.

⁵⁷ The FBI has released to the public over 48,000 documents it gathered from Jonestown (letter to Fielding M. McGehee III, dated 23 November 1998, stating that there are 48,738 pages available). By telephone FBI FOIA officer Linda Kloss stated that the FBI has put the documents on CD-ROM. The FBI also has 364 pages from its investigative files on the Leo Ryan murder posted at <<http://foia.fbi.gov/jonestown.htm>>, accessed 19 February 2000.

⁵⁸ Michael Meiers, *Was Jonestown a CIA Medical Experiment? A Review of the Evidence* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 350.

⁶⁰ I should point out that Meiers states that, "it is entirely possible that Rebecca Moore was a communications conduit between the experiment and the faction of the federal government that sponsored it" (509). Nevertheless, he recommends reading *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown* "as long as the reader understands that it is a defense of the Moore family and questions that it is a defense of the CIA," 509-10.

⁶¹ Meiers, 519. John Judge reached the same conclusions—that Jonestown was a CIA mind control experiment—a few years earlier. "The Black Hole of Guyana: The Untold Story of the Jonestown Massacre," in *Secret and Suppressed: Banned Ideas and Hidden History*, ed. Jim Keith (Portland, OR: Feral House, 1993), 127-65. The original draft was written in 1985.

⁶² Nathan Landau, *Heavenly Deceptor: The True Story Behind the Jonestown Massacre, Including Connections to the Kennedy and King Assassinations* (Brooklyn, NY: Sound of Music Publishing, 1992).

⁶³ Landau says that he based his book on extensive interviews with Teri Buford. He does not present a sympathetic picture of the top financial aide who escaped Jonestown one month before the deaths.

⁶⁴ Missing are Elvis and UFOs.

⁶⁵ Landau's group includes Tim Carter, Mike Carter, Mike Prokes, Phil Blakey (off-shore), Charles Garry, and Mark Lane, as well as people in Georgetown and Teri Buford.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Brailey, *The Ghosts of November: Memoirs of an Outsider Who Witnessed the Carnage at Jonestown, Guyana* (San Antonio, TX: J&J Publishers, 1998).

⁶⁷ Brailey includes an appendix titled "Last Rights," which consists of a chapter taken from Rebecca Moore, *In Defense of Peoples Temple, and Other Essays* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

⁶⁸ Brailey, 89.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 104-05.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 158.

⁷¹ "Revisiting the Jonestown Tragedy," *Freedom Magazine* n.v. (1997): 4-11. Michael Meiers also believes the CIA targeted Ryan, and that in fact the Jonestown deaths merely covered up the agency's true purpose: to assassinate Ryan.

⁷² *Freedom*, 10-11, emphasis in original.

⁷³ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁴ Laurie Efrein Kahalas, *Snake Dance: Unravelling the Mysteries of Jonestown* (New York: Red Robin Press, 1998).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 353.

⁷⁶ Hougan produced a documentary on Peoples Temple and Jonestown for the Arts and Entertainment Network which ran in 1998, and continues to run on Bill Kurtis' *American Justice* series.

⁷⁷ Jim Hougan, "Jonestown: The Secret Life of Jim Jones: A Parapolitical Fugue," *Lobster* 37 (Summer 1999): 2-20.

⁷⁸ Hougan is indebted to Alan W. McCoy for raising questions about Jones' whereabouts in the 1960s, as well as for other leads provided in McCoy's book, *The Guyana Murders* (San Francisco: Highland House, 1988).

⁷⁹ Although McCoy also makes this point, and I do in *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown*, Hougan puts it into a new frame for better viewing.

⁸⁰ Hougan, e-mail to Rebecca Moore dated 9 July 1999.

⁸¹ *Freedom*, 11.

⁸² Dave Phillips, quoted in *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 1 August 1999.

⁸³ Wilson Harris, *Jonestown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

⁸⁴ Daniel Quinn, *My Ishmael* (New York: Bantam Books, 1998).

⁸⁵ Lorne L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. Dawson tends to rely on Marc Galanter's theory of "social encapsulation" to explain Peoples Temple (147-48) and to use the analysis of Peoples Temple provided by Robbins and Anthony in "Sects and Violence" (131-46).