

How Orwell's *1984* Has Influenced Rev. Jim Jones to Dominate and Then Destroy His Followers: With Extensions to Current Political Leaders

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This article introduces some of the ways in which current political leaders use mind control techniques to manipulate their followers' beliefs and actions. To more fully appreciate how they do so, we will rely on an in-depth analysis of how Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones did so earlier by putting into daily practice the strategies and tactics featured in Orwell's novel *1984*. Eight of Jones's extractions from Orwell's litany of state control tactics will be detailed, followed by revelations of how he put them into diabolical daily practice to totally dominate his thousand loyal followers—eventuating in their mass suicide/murder 40 years ago in Jonestown, Guyana.

Public Significance Statement

Orwell's novel *1984*, about State domination of all citizens through tactics of mind control, were actually put into practice by Reverend Jim Jones to dominate and eventually destroy all of his Peoples Temple followers—ending in the mass suicide/murder of over 909 members in Guyana, 1978.

Keywords: Jim Jones, George Orwell, *1984*, Peoples Temple, mind control

The enigma of Jim Jones remains as puzzling today, in 2019, as it was 40 long years ago, when on November 18, 1978, nearly a thousand of his devoted followers were murdered by other members of his “church,” while some voluntarily committed suicide as a test of their devotion to their Father/God/Devil/Jim Jones. We will never fully know the truth about what really happened on that fateful day. However, it is vital that we learn and appreciate how it could happen then, and maybe again in our times.

But what we do know is that in our current global sociopolitical context, many world leaders are now putting into daily practice Jones' strategies and tactics. These authoritarian, populist dictators can be found in many nations, including Russia's Vladimir Putin, Brazil's Javier Bolsonaro, Hungary's Viktor Orban, Turkey's Recep Erdogan, Philippine's Rodrigo Duterte, North Korea's Kim Jung Un, and America's Donald Trump. Although these leaders are from diverse backgrounds and rule very different populations, they all unknowingly utilize some of

the mind control manipulations of George Orwell and Jim Jones.


For example, consider President Trump's media masterminding. First, he challenges the truth presented in traditional media as “fake news.” Then Trump replaces the truth with his fabrications and fantasies. His medium of choice, Twitter, allows him to project his personal illusions as unchallenged factual reality. Even his most outrageous claims are then believed and acted upon by millions of his true believers who subscribe to his many social media platforms (see Hassan, 2019).

By our study of Jim Jones we can understand more fully and deeply how these national leaders manipulate and control their followers. However, Jones did not invent these mass domination machinations. He borrowed all of them from George Orwell's detailed depiction of them in his political novel, *1984*.

In my 40 years of studying the psychology of mind control, and also all of the events surrounding Jim Jones in San Francisco and

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Jonestown, Guyana, I believe our current understanding of political mass mind control can be enriched by drawing parallels with George Orwell's *1984*. His brilliant insights into how political systems can control the minds and behavior of followers, often without their awareness, provides a playbook not only for Jones' use of these principles to dominate his followers, but also to better appreciate their utilization by many political leaders, such as those mentioned above.

Destructive leaders can sow seeds of conflict within their own groups, especially when certain followers are given privileges or access to the leader that are denied to others. Jealousy can inflame paranoia among followers, especially when a leader uses spying and surveillance to keep tabs on everyone. Members can turn against each other in their desire to obtain power within an organization, or gain closer access to the leader. The leader may even strive to enflame such foment because this can allow him to keep greater control over his followers, and prevent a small group of resisters from aligning to overthrow him. However, destructive leaders can exert malign influence beyond their immediate group of followers as well. When leaders paint others who are not members of the group as "bad" or "evil" or otherwise defective outsiders, this can encourage group members to engage in prejudice, discrimination, or even outright violence against others. In this way, destructive leaders can incite hostility both among followers as well as against the wider world.

Orwell as Jones' Preacher

Our main focus highlights parallels between the mind control tactics and strategies employed by Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones and those found throughout George Orwell's book *1984* (Orwell, 1949). My earlier analysis revealed curious similarities between the procedures that Jones put into effect to dominate his followers both in San Francisco and in his jungle compound in Guyana (see [Zimbardo, 1983](#)). The strong form of that argument is that Jones learned those techniques directly from reading Orwell's *1984*. He tested the operational utility of these imaginative, fictional techniques with him as "Party Head" and his "System" in control of the minds and lives of more than a thousand real people—U.S. citizens, whom he had transformed into "True Believers" (see also [Sullivan & Zimbardo, 1979](#)).

In recent times, this analysis has been deepened by extensive discussions about the Peoples Temple and Jim Jones with Debby Layton, one of Jones' inner circle, who defected and then led the public exposé of the evils being perpetrated at Jonestown ([Layton, 1998](#); [Yee & Layton, 1982](#)). Debbie enriched this analysis by calling upon the first-hand expertise of Mike Cartmell, who had once been married to Jones' adopted daughter Suzanne, and who was his heir apparent. Stephan Jones, Jim Jones' biological son (who was in Georgetown playing basketball on the day of the massacre) also added valuable insider knowledge. The three of them provided new insights and information that formed the basis of the argument advanced here that Jim Jones modeled his mind control tactics directly on those he had learned from George Orwell (see also [Galanter, 1999](#); [Hassan, 1988](#); [Schefflin & Opton, 1978](#); [Schrage, 1978](#); [Weightman, 1983](#); U.S. Congress, 1979).

Did Jim Jones read *1984*? The affirmative answer is revealed in this excerpt from an electronic message sent to me by Stephan Jones (reproduced with his permission, 10 March, 2000): "Dad did

read *1984*, talked about it plenty to frighten us. I think he may have even attached some kind of prophetic significance to the date—nuclear holocaust or fascist takeover or something. Yup, there was a song ["1984"] written and performed by Diane Wilkerson, our lead performer from the time she joined 'til she died in Jonestown."

Debbie Layton was the first person to specifically highlight Jones' fascination with Orwell's novel. "Jim talked about *1984* all the time. There is a film with Diane singing '1984' in Jonestown and Jim is singing along with her, saying, 'That's right, that's right.' He would sing, 'Got to watch out. They are coming to get us. They are going to kill us,' and similar phrases." (personal communication, San Francisco, December 6, 2000).

During that same conversation, Cartmell also recalled Jones' interest in *1984*, as well as his close reading of the reports of the Nuremberg trials. Goering's defense of Hitler in those trials also influenced Jones. Of the creation of a totalitarian state and of an all-powerful dominant leader, Jones would say, "That's exactly the point!" Cartmell recalled that Jones also read Lewis Fisher's biography of Lenin, and a number of other books about cults. It is surprising what a prodigious memory he possessed, and how well-read Jones was about so many issues related to power, leadership, race and gender.

In fact, many of his ideas on these issues were derived from the earlier African American messianic leader Father Divine preaching in New York ([Morris, 2019](#)).

Eight Direct Parallels of Orwellian and Jonesian Mind Control Tactics

"Black White" Distortion of Language and Newspeak Distortion of Reality are Both Reflected in Jones' Big Lies

Jones went further than to distort the reality of the past; he was able to distort reality, as it existed in his followers' perceptions of the present. These hungry, fearful, exhausted, overworked, and abused people were forced to say their "gratitudes" regularly as they meditated upon "Dad." Gratitudes were a litany of praise for Dad's providing them with good food, a good home, and good work because he loved them so, despite the totally contrary evidence provided by their senses. People held captive in this jungle concentration camp, while policed around the clock by armed guards, gave thanks to Dad for their "freedom and liberty." In addition, members told themselves, and also wrote in their letters home to their families, a series of big lies, such as the following: The food was good and abundant, when it was horrible and scarce; the weather was lovely when it was brutally hot; there were no insects, when mosquitos ferociously attacked them; they were happy, when many were extremely depressed and frightened.

Jones went a bit too far, however, by asserting that in Jonestown there was no sickness, no illness, and no death! Not even he could control those forces, and he had to deal with that uncontrollable discontinuity when members of his flock got ill and died. Jones even played Nazi horror films, such as *Night and Fog*, to remind his followers that their condition could/would get worse if they did not obey him. One can hear his lies escalating during the tape of the last hour in Jonestown as he says, "I have never lied to you,"

as he entreats the people to take the cyanide poison, which he refers to as “medicine.” He shouts out, “it will not hurt, there is nothing to fear” as hundreds of children are heard crying, screaming, convulsing, and dying.

While the Ministry of Truth rewrote history in 1984, Jones was able to get his god-fearing, religious followers to tear up and discard their beloved Bibles, after he exposed the lies and errors he claimed that he had found in his careful reading of the New Testament. In passing, I appreciate Jones’ mimicking of Orwell’s imaginative titles for the various departments in the Party, such as the Ministry of Truth that is in charge of distorting truth. Jones created a *Department of Diversion*, headed by Terri Buford, whose purpose was to carry out sensitive work in the government, which involved gathering personally embarrassing data on selected politicians that could be used to persuade them to cooperate with the goals and needs of the Peoples Temple—or be exposed.

Curiously, the recent Oscar-winning movie, *Icarus* (2017, Bryan Fogel) highlights many variants of Orwell’s 1984 Newspeak while exposing the Soviet doping scandal of their Olympic athletes. Agencies allegedly created to prevent and publicly expose the creation of performance-enhancing drugs for their athletes were in fact doing the opposite by manufacturing new more powerful drugs and elaborate processes for concealing their widespread use. President Vladimir Putin repeatedly asserted, “no doping” even as he ordered the director of the nation’s antidoping laboratory to “dope better.” Soviet athletes went on to win an unprecedented number of Olympic medals in London, Sochi, and Rio de Janeiro!

Big Brother Is Watching You: Big Daddy Is Infiltrating Your Every Thought

The concept of working “24/7” would seem to be a recent concept initiated in Silicon Valley to describe around the clock, daily work and tech services, but it was predated by Jim Jones’ day and night broadcasts of sermons, speeches, and fiery attacks on the government, defectors, and other enemies.¹

In place of the Telescreen surveillance in 1984, Jones reached into the minds of his followers by blasting them with these endless messages that blared from loudspeakers in the central pavilion and that could be heard for great distances. Sometimes live, sometimes taped, his oratorical presence always filled the airways, and thus the “mind ways,” while his followers worked, ate, and slept.

These strategies are not restricted to Jones. North Korean Leader Kim Jung Un uses a similar approach, even more powerfully. Every resident must have a government-issued radio in his or her home that is always tuned to only the national official station. The radio can never be turned off, the station cannot be changed, and only the volume can be adjusted, but still heard softly.

Spy Network: Jones’ Informer System

Jones rewarded those faithful informers who ratted out other members who complained about the hard work, awful rations, and enforced separation of spouses. Jones then severely punished all such dissidents publicly. He even announced that he would send around comrades who would pretend to be dissenters to lure others into agreeing to complain or worse, to defect, and then mete out violent punishments to these traitors. His spy system was started much earlier in the United States by having members of his

security force find out as much as possible about various members by breaking into their homes, checking their garbage, tapping their phones, or worse, rewarding family members who informed on each other.

Both the Party and Jones Enforced Food Deprivation: A Means to Weaken the Strength to Resist or Rebel

The diet in Jonestown consisted of small portions, was poor tasting, and was almost protein free. It was heavy on rice-like gruel, never meat or fish, with few fruits and vegetables. Jones chided those who complained that it was better to be slim than to be fat asses, and that they were rejecting capitalistic values by making such sacrifices. What is amazing, sad, and horrific is that people in Jonestown were often near starvation while Jones was regularly sending millions of dollars to secret bank accounts in Switzerland, Panama, and elsewhere with his couriers, including Debbie Layton (Layton, 1998) and a few other trusted female aides. A small fraction of these funds could have easily fed the entire congregation well but was intentionally denied to them.

Sex Crimes: Jones Separated Married Couples Into Different Barracks, and They Could Be Intimate Only With His Permission, at Prescribed Times

Jones openly accused specific men of taking homosexual improprieties with him, and then had them publicly ridiculed and punished. In addition, Jones publicly accused women of forcing him to favor them with his sexual gifts, when of course, he was the coercive agent. Sex was a powerful motive for Jones, who often seemed obsessed with his own sexual desires. Part of his image was that of a superman of extraordinary sexual appetites and enduring performances. But he also realized the powerful bonds that human sexuality could create among his followers, and so such sex crimes had to be controlled, limited, and dominated by his authority.

Self-Incrimination: Writing Oneself Up, Self-Catharsis, and Personal Punishments

These tactics were a central part of both Orwell’s and Jones’ mind control systems. All members had to engage in self-analysis, to prepare statements of their errors, weaknesses, fears, and wrongdoings, so that they could purge themselves of these negative thoughts and achieve an uplifting catharsis. Instead, these reports became part of each member’s permanent file, and were used against them in public meetings, when errant individuals were “called on the floor” to be ridiculed, humiliated, tormented, or physically tortured. Even the most loyal follower could become his or her worst enemy in these ways.

¹ For readers interested in more documentary materials about Jonestown, please access NPR tapes (see refs), and also note that tape transcripts, summaries, some primary source documents, and photographs not otherwise designated as copyrighted on this site are free and available to the public for use by crediting: The Jonestown Institute, <http://jonestown.sdsu.edu>.

Orwell's Analysis of the Party Mentality and the Psychology of War Also Applies to Jonestown All Too Well: This Was Most Evident in the Final Days and in Jonestown's Last Hours

Orwell writes, "The social atmosphere is that of a besieged city . . . it does not matter that war is actually happening. All that is needed is that a state of war should exist" (p. 158), and when capture was inevitable, "the proper thing was to kill yourself before they get you" (p. 86).

Jones had his group practice suicide drills in "White Night" exercises that were realistic preludes to the final performance that he orchestrated, just as Orwell had depicted, with the threat of the U.S. military on its way to take away and harm the children and elders. "Revolutionary suicide" was preferable to being massacred at the hands of this ruthless enemy, he said, comparing the actions of Peoples Temple members with that of the besieged Jews at the battle of Masada (see *National Public Radio, 1981; Nugent, 1979; Reiterman & Jacobs, 1982; Reston, 1981*).

It is not clear how many of the 909 dead willingly committed suicide by drinking cyanide, and how many were murdered with poison injections, but the important thing to remember is that the killers were the friends and family members of those who were killed. Here Jim Jones imitates Heinrich Himmler's SS oath: "I swear to thee, Adolf Hitler, loyalty and bravery. I vow to thee and to the superiors whom thou shall appoint, obedience until death." So, total blind obedience to unjust authority ruled that fateful day in November 1978, as it had for so many decades earlier in Nazi Germany, and later revealed in the psychological experiments of Stanley Milgram in the mid-1960s (see *Blass, 2000; Milgram, 1974*).

Orwell's Torture Room 101 Is Mirrored in the Jonestown Torture Chambers: The Blue-Eyed Monster, Bigfoot, and the Box

Orwell's leading protagonist, Winston Smith, finally has his resistance broken when he is dumped into Room 101 to face his worst fear of having rats running over his body, since he had confessed earlier to that phobia. Jones replicated that situation exactly by initially forcing members to write out their fears in detail. He could then force them to face their worst fears head on when they disobeyed orders, were late for a meeting, or fell asleep during his endless harangues.

It is well to point up one way in which Jones was able to create such True Believers, when Orwell's 1984 system, or even Soviet Communism in Eastern Europe, could not. Jones had the ability to make a uniquely personal connection with each member of his church. Many Peoples Temple members told me that, when listening to his sermons, each felt as if Jones were talking to them personally. "Jones had the personal touch down," Mike Cartmell reported. "He was like a priest, a personal counselor, coming to see each person who was important to him in some way, and spoke to them personally about what is troubling them, what they are afraid of. Jones could make everyone feel as if he or she was his guest of the day. He made each one feel special in some way. He gave you your five minutes, and in return, you gave him your life."

And so, despite the public torment they often received, members retained the sense that down deep, in his private heart, "Dad loves

me," and I am responsible for being a bad person who needs to change his evil ways to deserve Dad's love.

In her memoir *Six Years with God*, Jeanne Mills (*Mills, 1979*) described her young daughter's torment when faced with the "Blue-Eyed Monster," where she and other children were punished. "They took me into this dark room and the monsters were all over the room. They said, 'I am the Blue-Eyed Monster and I'm going to get you.' Then the monster grabbed my shirt and tore it open" (p. 55). Mills figured that the children were being given electric shocks, because she had heard that "Jim was using the Blue-Eyed Monster as 'behavior modification' for the small children" (p. 56).²

Mills describes other torture chambers in the Peoples Temple. "Debbie [Layton] told us about 'Bigfoot,' a punishment that had replaced the 'Blue-Eyed Monster.' It's a deep well about forty-five minutes' walk away from the camp," she said sadly. "Counselors have to sit in there, and when the child is disciplined they throw the child down the well. The kids would cry hysterically as soon as Jim would tell them they'd have to go visit Bigfoot. We'd hear them scream all the way there, and all the time they had to be down in the well, and by the time they got back they were begging for mercy. It was really awful. Some young people were forced to eat hot peppers or even have hot peppers put up their rectums as disciplines" (p. 60).

Conclusions

Obedience training, Newspeak, Crimestop, Doublethink, Reality Control, Emotional Control, Sexual Control, Surveillance, Torture, and hard work on starvation diets—the staples of the Orwellian mind controller's repertoire—were adapted and put into effective operation by Jim Jones in his attempt to demonstrate total behavior modification. Jones succeeded in his perverted mind control "experiment" by creating a mass mentality of the *Manchurian Candidate* that killed the enemy on demand . . . only here the enemy was one's children, one's parents, one's mate, one's friends, and even one's self!

Orwell would not have been pleased to see his dire warning about the dangers to social-justice-based nations of a totalitarian state (Stalin's USSR) enacted out by this latter-day disciple in the jungles of Guyana. Equally distressing to him would have been the subsequent flourishing of destructive cult leaders in many other countries, such as in Japan, Canada, Switzerland, the United States, and Uganda, all extracting the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of domination of free will, of individuality, of critical thought, and the suppression of the spirit of independence.

Jim Jones remains an enigma in many ways. He became the Devil incarnate, creating incredibly evil destructive scenarios, but was still deeply loved by many of his followers as their Father and God on earth. His sermons at the Peoples Temple in San Francisco became legendary, attracting many famous locals and even notable visitors, such as Rosalynn Carter, President Jimmy Carter's wife.

² Mills' account is a valuable resource into the creation of the Peoples Temple and of Jim Jones' destructive forces. In her presentation to my Stanford University course on the Psychology of Mind Control in 1979, Mills concluded that by defecting from Jones' church and exposing his immoral, illegal, and evil tactics, she was putting her life at risk. Sadly, Jeannie Mills, her husband, and son were murdered in their own home in Berkeley, California. No culprit was ever found.

Mayor George Moscone admired his talents for organizing large teams for various public events, such as appearing at the dedication of an antisuicide initiative at the Golden Gate Bridge, and advocating a prolife way of thinking. Another opportunity for Jones to be a do-gooder came when Moscone appointed him as head of the city's housing commission. Many insiders believed that this could have been the start of Jones' rise in the local political scene. San Francisco investigative reporters uncovered much information about Jones' ugly side (Kilduff & Javers, 1978; Kilduff & Tracy, 1977). Defectors were reporting his abuses, illegal activities, and the plan to move his tribe to a safe zone beyond the reach of American justice.

How was Jones able to relocate nearly a thousand U.S. citizens to a socialist country of Guyana, South America? How was he able to get armed weapons shipped there, and also government monthly checks of his followers sent there regularly? How was he able to ship millions of dollars to foreign banks? One answer is that Jim Jones was a CIA undercover operative for many years. Did the CIA aid and abet Jones' mind control strategies? For supporting evidence see Meiers (1989) — Was Jonestown a CIA medical experiment?

Timely Relevance

We have seen the enemy of Orwell and the enemy of Jones, and “That enemy is US!” We will go down as they did if we do not learn from the lessons of the past to oppose tyranny at its first signs, and to be vigilant in cutting through political rhetoric and semantic distortions by all those with any power to control communication media and educational systems. Despots and dictators, whether demonic or benevolent, demean human nature and defile the human connection.

In defying Big Brother, we assert our community with all those who value freedom over security, who would die for liberty rather than live a life of mindless obedience to unjust authority. Instead, we choose to aim high collectively in becoming “everyday heroes in training” whose mission is to stand up, speak out, while taking wise and effective action to oppose evil in all of its manifestations, and to nurture goodness locally and globally (Zimbardo, 1970, 2007, 2018).

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