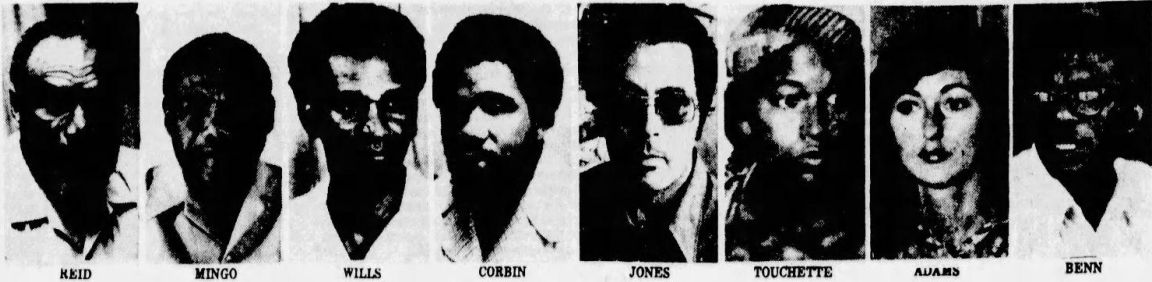


## Jonestown

### The participants

Some of the principals involved in the Peoples Temple story are: Guyana Deputy Prime Minister Ptolemy Reid; Home Affairs Minister Claude V. Mingo; former Foreign Minister Frederick R. Wills; Minister of State Robert H.O. Corbin; cult leader Jim Jones; cult liasons with the Guyanan officials Deborah Touchette and Paula Adams; former Minister Brindley Benn, who first demanded investigation of the encampment. (AP Wirephoto)



## Many Questions About Jonestown May Go Unanswered

WASHINGTON (AP) — As identification of those in the mass suicide-murder in Guyana continues, authorities say many questions probably never will be answered — including how many of the cultists took their own lives and how many were actually killed.

Furthermore, medical, legal and insurance experts say, the unanswered questions very likely will lead to future court fights over insurance settlements because of the uncertainty about the specific cause of death.

As of Saturday, military pathologists at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware had fingerprinted all 911 bodies brought back from Jonestown, prepared nearly 800 of them for burial and identified 255.

But when the bodies arrived they were already so decomposed that fingerprints in many cases may be unusable and nearly one-third of the victims may never be positively identified, Justice

Department officials said.

State and federal governments have ruled out autopsies for all but seven of the corpses. Because of this, some leading pathologists said, it will be all but impossible to solve the mystery of what really happened that fateful day — Nov. 18 — at the Peoples Temple commune at Jonestown.

One pathologist, Dr. Lynn Crook, went to Jonestown three days after the deaths. From what he saw, Crook said, he believes the bodies probably were so decomposed by the time they arrived in Dover that autopsies would not have shed much light on the tragedy.

Survivors said the commune members committed mass suicide by drinking a cyanide potion, some of which was found left in a metal pot. But the survivors also told of a ring of armed security guards, giving rise to rampant speculation that some cultists, perhaps even

large numbers, may have been shot or forced to take the poison.

"You never will be able to prove that those who drank this mixture did so voluntarily or involuntarily," said Michael Abbell of the Justice Department's criminal division.

A number of forensic pathologists interviewed said signs of small caliber bullet wounds or beatings could easily go undiscovered without at least limited autopsies.

Assistant Attorney General Philip Heilmann told reporters that although the department wants to find out as much as it can about the deaths, they are of marginal interest to the U.S. government because it has jurisdiction only over the murder of Rep. Leo Ryan by cult members.

Federal law gives the government jurisdiction over the murder of a member of Congress and murder or attempted

murder of a State Department representative in another country.

However, the department last week ordered autopsies on seven bodies — the Rev. Jim Jones, the cult's leader, two of his top lieutenants and four cult members picked at random — to "put the question to rest" and hopefully head off future speculation.

Some forensic pathologists said they believe at least limited individual examination and tests should have been conducted on each body to attempt to determine conclusively how each cult member died.

"Unless you know what each cause of death is, there will be lots of questions that will persist," said Dr. Mike Baden, chief medical examiner of New York City, and an authority on forensic medicine who was retained by the House assassinations committee in the President John F. Kennedy murder investigation.

Baden and other pathologists interviewed said several questions that could be answered by limited autopsies include:

Did the victims die of cyanide poisoning or gunshot wounds? Were there signs of trauma caused by physical abuse just prior to death? Were the victims under the influence of other drugs at the time of death?

Crook, a pathologist at the Medical University of South Carolina, who went to Guyana at the request of U.S. officials, said he saw no outward evidence of violence, but that he was not allowed to examine the bodies in Jonestown. Crook said, however, he is convinced most drank the cyanide solution, although it was unknown how many may have been forced to do so.

Insurance companies have been keeping a close watch on the Guyana developments, and Christopher H. Wayne, a

vice president of Prudential Insurance Co., said his company already has received "four or five" claims arising from the mass deaths.

Daniel Bloom, a Seattle attorney and authority on insurance law, said the Jonestown deaths may have "all sorts of ramifications" but the key question remains the one of murders vs. suicide.

Insurance companies do not pay claims on a suicide if the policy is less than two years old at the time of death, while in the case of murder, many policies pay double because such a death would be interpreted as accidental, insurance experts say.

"I suppose there are going to be some suits," said an executive of one of the largest insurance firms. The executive, who asked not to be identified, said most insurance companies probably would consider the Jonestown deaths suicides, and probably "the beneficiary will get a lawyer and go to court."