

Peoples Temple: A Typical Cult?

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On November 18, 1978, more than 900 Americans in a jungle settlement in Guyana, South America, died in a mass murder-suicide. Led by a charismatic preacher named Jim Jones, the members of Peoples Temple had begun the agricultural project of Jonestown in the northwest territory of Guyana in 1974, had immigrated into the project *en masse* in 1977, and had lived as a community of 1,000 residents for over a year. The circumstances of their departure from the United States, coupled with allegations of criminal and civil wrongdoing both in the United States and Guyana, prompted a U.S. congressman to launch an investigation of the group, which culminated in his visit to Jonestown and his assassination at a jungle airstrip shortly after he left the settlement. In all, five people died at Port Kaituma, Guyana: Rep. Leo Ryan, three reporters who had accompanied him, and a Peoples Temple defector.¹ Evidence indicates that the mass deaths in Jonestown began soon after the airstrip attack.

The events shocked the world, and the bizarre stories of drugs, sex, and guns that were reported in the following weeks—most of which turned out to be false—fueled the sensationalism surrounding the world's introduction to Peoples Temple. The descriptions of the group, provided mainly by former members and critics, and the instant media analyses of life and death in Jonestown shaped public understanding of the Temple and reinforced public perceptions about the dangers of cults. Indeed, Jonestown emerged as the paradigm of the dangerous cult, serving as the benchmark for measuring religious violence in subsequent years. It suggests every negative attribute—brainwashing and fanaticism, maniacal leaders and blind followers—that many of us associate with unfamiliar or unusual religious groups, from the Branch Davidians in Texas to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

But Peoples Temple was far from typical. First of all, external political and social pressures appeared to threaten its survival in very real ways, and the Temple's members responded accordingly. Second, Peoples Temple differed greatly from its contemporary religious movements, most especially in its demographic profile, which featured a predominantly black, family-oriented membership. Third, the group held

the unusual commitment to collective, rather than individual, salvation. If many New Religious Movements (NRMs) focused on helping the individual soul, Peoples Temple emphasized saving the collective body. Finally, with the move to Jonestown, Peoples Temple shifted from being a religious or quasi-religious group living in the world, to being a utopian community set apart from and outside of the world. Thus, to call Peoples Temple a typical cult is inaccurate and inappropriate. Far from being typical, Peoples Temple is anomalous because it differed in so many ways from what cult experts and the general public believe about cults.²

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Peoples Temple Christian Church began as a Pentecostal-style congregation in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the 1950s. Its commitment to interracial worship and civil rights quickly brought it into conflict with local churches and the larger community. James Warren Jones (1931–1978) preached a message of social equality that challenged the segregated society of the 1950s. Jones married Marceline Baldwin (1927–1978), a nurse, and together they established nursing homes in cooperation with committed church members, both black and white. In addition to having a biological son, they adopted a “rainbow” family, which included Korean and African American children.

The Temple’s congregation in Indianapolis primarily came from the working class, and shared a commitment to an ecstatic, revivalistic form of Christianity. Jones retained the style of a Bible-based Pentecostal minister, warning in one sermon, “Don’t you get up and tell me you’re born to God. Why, we need to get born to God. Truly and fully born to God. For he that’s born to God doth not commit sin.”³ But Jones also radicalized traditional Pentecostalism, where the preacher liberally sprinkles biblical references throughout a free-form sermon, and transformed it into an urgent call to concrete righteousness. The difference between the Temple and other local churches was its emphasis on a social gospel message, where Jones urged blacks and whites to literally take up the gospel and serve the poor and the marginalized in tangible ways. The Indiana Temple implemented Jesus’s demand to help the poor, which was evident in the church’s soup kitchen and its care facilities for indigents and the elderly.

Jones went beyond conventional interpretations of the charismatic nature of the primitive church as described in Paul’s letters and the Acts of the Apostles, to remind his congregation of the foundational egalitarianism of early Christianity described in Acts 2 and 4:

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common (Acts 4:32).

Jones took a rather courageous stand, proposing what sounded much like Communism in the 1950s. “Preaching the social gospel, Jones personified the worst fears of the more conservative clergy and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover in the McCarthy

era,” writes John R. Hall. “Pulpits were being infiltrated by Communists, sometimes using Black rights as a rallying cry for a movement of communist agitation for the cause of a collective society.”⁴ But it was a “communism” found in the Bible that the “poor white trash” and the “Negroes” of Indianapolis—both disenfranchised and marginalized—found appealing.

Jones’s uncompromising opposition to racial segregation, both in the church and in the community, led to his appointment as the director of the Indianapolis Human Rights Commission in 1961, a position in which he received death threats for his integrationist activities. Perhaps to escape the racial tensions, Jones and his family traveled to Hawaii, and then moved to Brazil where he evangelized the poor in Belo Horizonte.⁵

Different accounts give varying reasons for the Temple’s move from Indiana to California. Some say that Jones had a revelation of nuclear holocaust, which he communicated to his congregation, that necessitated a move from Indianapolis to a safer locale. Others say that Jones read an article in *Esquire Magazine*, which claimed that northern California would be a safe haven in the event of a nuclear attack. Still others note that California was a good place for a group of progressive Christians to live and work in the 1970s. For whatever reasons, about 70 people migrated from Indianapolis to Redwood Valley, a small town in northern California, in the mid-1960s. About half of the families were white, and half were black. As in Indiana, the interracial group encountered racism in the predominantly white area of the California wine country, with children facing harassment from schoolmates. At the same time, however, the group began to attract young white educated professionals who facilitated the expansion of the Temple from rural Redwood Valley to urban San Francisco and south to Los Angeles.⁶ The Temple saw rapid growth in size and membership in the 1970s, eventually moving its headquarters to the heart of San Francisco’s black ghetto at that time, the Fillmore District.⁷ It had become a member in good standing of the Disciples of Christ denomination and was the largest donor congregation in that denomination for the year 1978.

With the move to Redwood Valley, and the ultimate relocation to San Francisco, Jones’s message grew more political, and Temple members became activists in a number of social movements. The importance of specifically Christian aspects of the gospel diminished, as can be seen in this sermon that Jones preached in San Francisco in 1973:

Man, the only sin you’re born in, is the society, the kind of community you live in. If you’re born in a socialist community, then you’re not born in sin. If you’re born in this church, this socialist revolution, you’re not born in sin. If you’re born in capitalist America, racist America, fascist America, then you’re born in sin. But if you’re born in socialism, you’re not born in sin.⁸

Jones criticized the “Sky God” of Christianity and replaced it with the impersonal God of Principle: “God is Principle, Principle is Love, and Love is Socialism.”⁹ The Trinity of Socialism (God), Revolution (Christ), and Justice (Jesus) replaced the passive, do-nothing God of Christianity, which allowed injustice to continue

within the churches.¹⁰ Jones pragmatically, and logically, deduced that such a deity was not worthy of worship. Only the god of righteousness deserved respect, and this god could be seen embodied within Jim Jones himself.

I'm everywhere. Self has died. I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. I've been crucified with the revolution.... The life that I now live, I live through this great Principle, the Christ, the socialist Principle that was on the day of Pentecost when it said, "God is love, and love means they have everything in common."¹¹

Jones was the messiah of the reign of God, the true kingdom where all would be equal and there would be plenty for all.

Remnants of traditions common to evangelical or fundamentalist piety—such as healings, gospel music, long sermons, and plenty of "amens"—coexisted along with an increasingly militant message on the necessity for social change. "At their essence, the worship services at Peoples Temple were constructed around the model of the emotionally expressive Pentecostal tradition."¹² But it was Pentecostalism with a twist: fiery, radical, and political. Jones warned a congregation assembled in Philadelphia in 1976:

I tell you, we're in danger tonight, from a corporate dictatorship. We're in danger from a great fascist state, or a great communist state, and if the church doesn't build a utopian society, if it doesn't build an egalitarian society, we're going to be in trouble.¹³

What prompted the shift from a Christian social gospel proclamation in Indianapolis to a revolutionary socialist message in San Francisco? The shift is more apparent than real: Jones actually linked Christianity and socialism in his affirmation of "Apostolic Socialism"—the socialism of Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–37. He saw no discontinuity between the two ideas. God is love; love is socialism. Moreover, "the use of Black Power rhetoric by many members of Peoples Temple in the 1970s expressed a genuine desire to locate themselves and their community in the midst of an emergent global political and religious project."¹⁴ In other words, Jones and the Temple were speaking the revolutionary language of the 1970s, within the context of civil rights, Black Power, and emerging nationalism around the world. San Francisco in particular and California in general were hospitable climates for expressing radical political and religious sentiments. People understood the idiom of change and transformation, and could accept it in a Christian setting in those turbulent times.

While Jones declared a gospel of apostolic socialism, he also faked faith healings in order to attract members. Associates colluded with Jones on these healings, pretending to regain eyesight and mobility, or saying they were cured of cancer. They also distributed "prayer cloths" to take to those who could not attend church, and after many Sunday services Temple volunteers sold photographs of Jones to use as healing charms. Immediately following the deaths in Jonestown, reporters and columnists accused Jones of being a con artist, a charlatan, in it for personal gain or self-aggrandizement. These arguments fail in light of the fact that Jones never used the wealth he accumulated for the Temple on personal items such as cars, houses, or clothing. Hall explains that "Jones faked healings and discernments not only to

promote faith that would trigger more miracles but also to groom his own image as the messiah to whom others should look for prophetic leadership."¹⁵ While some members were taken in by the fakery, others knew what was going on and considered it unimportant to the real work of the group, which was to usher in a new society of social justice and racial equality.

Jones still was speaking in religious terms in 1976, especially when he preached to mixed audiences that included outsiders, particularly public officials, as well as insiders. People in San Francisco thought of the Temple as an activist black church with a white pastor. The church was credited with the election in a close mayoral race in San Francisco because of its get-out-the-vote drive, so much so that Jones was rewarded with an appointment to the San Francisco Housing Commission, where he eventually became commission chair. Martin Luther King Day celebrations held at the Temple featured a variety of prominent California Democrats, including the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the state assembly. When Rosalyn Carter traveled to San Francisco during the 1976 presidential campaign, she visited Peoples Temple. Peoples Temple members gave money to political parties—almost exclusively Republican in Republican Mendocino County, where Redwood Valley was located, but chiefly Democratic in San Francisco County. Bay Area activists understood the Temple's involvement in local politics within the context of its commitment to the Christian social gospel.

The overtly Christian elements of the movement faded away almost entirely, however, when the group began the mass migration to its agricultural project in Guyana in summer 1977. The group had been planning a move to "The Promised Land" since 1973, when it broke ground in the Northwest District of Guyana, on the northern coast of South America. Under terms of a lease negotiated with the government of Guyana, a small group of settlers had been clearing jungle, cultivating land, and building housing to accommodate the relocation of the movement in case it faced severe persecution in the United States. "If America ever becomes repressive," Jones told Dr. J. Alfred Smith, "and follows the path of Nazi Germany and turns against people of color, we will have a place to go."¹⁶

That moment came in 1977, when negative publicity, coupled with potential problems with the Internal Revenue Service, prompted the emigration of almost 1000 members in spring and summer that year. Although the pioneers who constructed Jonestown planned for small groups of people to move in slowly, get acclimated, and learn the ropes before others came too, massive numbers descended all at once and strained the community's limited resources. They found living conditions difficult and, at times, primitive. Despite the hardships, though, people believed they were going *to* something, and not just fleeing *from* something. "We have come here, the people of Jonestown, and we have come to build," wrote Dick Tropp in 1978.

We have our remorse, our bitterness, our scars. They will never go away. But Jim Jones has always believed in lighting candles rather than cursing the darkness. And we are determined to let our light shine.¹⁷

And build they did. Residents of all ages worked at a variety of tasks to support the cooperative effort. Most able-bodied adults, including young adults and some teenagers, worked in agriculture production, whether fieldwork, clearing land, caring for animals, or weeding crops. Others worked in construction, employed in the project's sawmill or building houses or making furniture. A number of residents labored in health care, others taught. Senior citizens made dolls and crafts to sell in Georgetown. Others worked in food preparation or taught school to the community's more than 200 children. It took plenty of work to maintain a community of 1000 residents, and everyone was involved in some aspect of the process.

The Temple's headquarters in San Francisco, with its satellite bases in Redwood Valley and Los Angeles, sustained the operations in Guyana in a variety of ways. These included fundraising and ongoing financial support, but also consisted of being the voice of the group to America. Temple members shipped clothing and medical supplies to Guyana. They maintained radio communication via shortwave radio. They served as an ongoing presence in light of the absence of the group's core. The heart had moved from "Babylon" to "The Promised Land."

Removed from the public eye in the remote jungles of the Orinoco River basin, Peoples Temple seemed to abandon all religious discourse. "Jim wasn't talking about God any more," according to Hyacinth Thrash, one of the few survivors who lived through the mass deaths.¹⁸ This is not to say that the members themselves did not retain an essentially Christian faith, as Thrash and others indicate,¹⁹ but rather that Jones's message and the outlook of the project were basically utopian in nature and aimed at survival as a model of apostolic socialism. Jonestown residents lived and worked together, pooled what economic resources they had—such as Social Security checks from the elderly and proceeds from the sale of handmade toys and crafts in Guyana's capital city of Georgetown—and seemed to leave overtly religious rhetoric behind. Tapes made by the community in Jonestown deal with agricultural, political, and personal questions, but no religious issues. For example, a number of tapes deal with problems in food production, with understanding local farming methods, and with division of labor in the fields.²⁰ Other transcripts from Jonestown feature Jones reading news from Eastern Bloc countries directly from a news wire.²¹ Still other tapes reveal how the community sought to inculcate a cooperative spirit and how it disciplined those who failed to measure up.²²

The most religious rhetoric to be found in Jonestown seems to have been the recurring discussion of sacrificial death in the form of "revolutionary suicide." Huey Newton, a founder of the Black Panther Party, had used the expression to highlight the fact that when people challenge systems of oppression, they run the risk of being killed by those systems. "As Newton used it, the term emphasizes revolution over death."²³ In Jonestown, however, revolutionary suicide had at least three different meanings, according to David Chidester. First, it functioned as a loyalty test; second, it prevented residents from dying a dehumanized and degrading death; and third, "it was used as a threat to force the outside world to accept the inviolable integrity of the community."²⁴ Religious suicide has a long history in rituals of purification, release from suffering, revenge, and revolution (which includes martyrdom). Jonestown

residents understood revolutionary suicide in all of these aspects, and tapes and documents from 1977 and 1978 show that "men, women, and children came forward, witnessing a willingness to seal their commitment to Jonestown in death."²⁵

In Jonestown, martyrdom in the face of an apocalyptic future replaced the more optimistic Christian social gospel of Indiana and California, although suicide had been discussed as early as 1973. Of course, Christianity began with its own martyr, Jesus Christ. But the difference, as noted by Ross Case, one of the Temple's pastors in its early years before he left and became a leader in the opposition, is that Jesus's death offered hope for the future; the Jonestown deaths did not. "The martyrs of Jonestown—that is, those who willingly died," writes Hall, "regarded their fate as connected to the honor of their struggle, not to its hope of triumph."²⁶ While the message of this kind of martyrdom did not reflect Christian teaching, it was nevertheless essentially a religious commitment that placed loyalty to each other and to the cause of socialism—against a racist and capitalist America—above the value of individual human life.

A number of Jonestown tapes paint a dark and foreboding picture, one in which children denounce their parents, community members are humiliated and frightened with threats (real and imaginary), and a sense of doom and imminent world destruction are pervasive. Less than a month before Ryan's visit, for example, a tape recording features residents of Jonestown explaining why they would rather commit revolutionary suicide than return to the United States. Reasons include avoiding hostile relatives, escaping the state of siege they believed was underway in the United States, disdaining the capitalistic system, and thwarting the conspiracy that they thought existed against the community. One speaker, Edith Roller, concludes a short statement in this way: "I'm glad that my death will mean something. I hope it will be an inspiration to all people that fight for freedom all over the world."²⁷ A horrifying tape in which residents describe the tortures they would inflict upon critical family members includes a young woman saying that she'd

personally like to grab my father and string him up by his nuts and have a hot poker, sticking it in some coals and sticking it up his ass, and burning the hell out of him, for doing the things he's doing, because he knows that you [Jones] saved my sister's life and he knows all the good things you did for us both, and he knew that we wanted to come over here and live peacefully, and this is why he's causing all this hell.²⁸

While voices of protest can occasionally be heard on various tapes recorded in Jonestown, more frequently residents join in laughter, applause, and approval of what Jones and others say in community meetings.

The people of Jonestown were far from home; dissenters could not leave easily. The lack of communication with outsiders, and the isolation and distance which residents created between themselves and the United States, led relatives and former Temple members to promote investigations of Peoples Temple and Jonestown. Calling itself the Concerned Relatives, the group organized a concerted effort to demand local, state, and federal investigations into Peoples Temple. It also motivated and

helped families to file lawsuits against the Temple for recovery of donated property, for slander, and for child custody. A major custody case brought relatives and Temple members into grave conflict, with both sides viewing custody of a five-year-old boy named John Victor Stoen as pivotal to their success. The Concerned Relatives saw the custody issue as reuniting a family and defeating Jones; the residents of Jonestown also saw it as directed against Jones, but considered it the first step toward the breakup of the Jonestown experiment as well.

Most importantly, the Concerned Relatives encouraged ongoing media coverage that portrayed Jonestown as a concentration camp. While this helped shape public opinion after the deaths, its greater significance was felt before November 18, the date of the deaths, as it created the atmosphere within which government bodies considered issues affecting the community's survival. The Concerned Relatives took their complaints to federal agencies, such as the State Department, the Federal Communications Commission, the Social Security Administration, and to Congress. They persuaded Congressman Leo Ryan (D-CA) to travel to Guyana in November 1978 with an entourage of people whom the Temple considered its worst enemies: hostile reporters and family members involved in legal actions against the Temple.

To tremendous applause, however, Ryan told the assembled residents of Jonestown on the night of November 17 that he could see the positive impact Jonestown had had on their lives.²⁹ By the next morning, though, a few disaffected residents indicated their desire to leave. The group of defectors grew to about 16. The number might seem small in a community of 1000, but it was momentous because these defectors included members from two families who belonged to the Indianapolis contingent. They were with Jones from the very beginning.³⁰ When Ryan, the reporters, some Concerned Relatives, and the departing Jonestown residents attempted to board two small airplanes at an airstrip six miles from Jonestown, a group of Jonestown residents pulled up in a truck 100 yards away and began shooting. In all, five people were killed and a dozen were wounded at the airstrip. The shooters took particular pains to make sure that Ryan and the reporters were dead. Larry Layton, who posed as a defector, fired a pistol on board one of the airplanes, but was quickly disarmed. He was the only resident of Jonestown ever to serve prison time for the crimes committed that day.³¹

After Ryan's group left Jonestown in the early afternoon, Jones called people together at the community's central pavilion. An audiotape recorded parts of the ensuing discussion between Jones and community members during the final hours.³² The tape starts and stops—raising the possibility that the tape might be a fake, assembled from bits and pieces of other recordings—but many audiotapes recovered from Jonestown show that such spontaneous editing was Jones's practice, and so it seems to be a fairly accurate depiction of what happened. One 60-year-old woman, Christine Miller, argued against killing the children and asked about moving to the Soviet Union, a second emigration that had been discussed frequently in Jonestown. Although Jones let her speak for a while, others finally shouted her down. Parents then began to kill their children, forcing them to drink a mixture of tranquilizers, cyanide, and fruit punch.

It is not entirely clear how much coercion was required for people to kill themselves. The late Dr. Leslie Mootoo, chief pathologist for Guyana, believed that most people were murdered.³³ Cecil A. "Skip" Roberts, Guyana's Assistant Crime Commissioner, came to a different conclusion. "Jones was clever," he told us six months after the deaths. "He had parents kill their children first. Who would want to live after that?"³⁴ Jones also gave orders via radio transmission to the members at the San Francisco headquarters to commit suicide and also to those in Georgetown, where about 80 people were staying in the Temple's headquarters in Guyana's capital city. Only one woman in Georgetown, Sharon Amos, obeyed the order, slitting the throats of her birth daughter, her two adopted children, and then herself.

Altogether, 918 people died that day: 909 in Jonestown; five at the Port Kaituma airstrip; and four in Georgetown.

THE MODEL OF A DANGEROUS CULT?

There are several reasons why it is inappropriate to identify Peoples Temple as the model for dangerous cults. The first takes into account the unique external pressures that contributed to the deaths in Jonestown. The second considers the makeup of the Peoples Temple membership, a predominantly black demographic that challenges traditional understandings of NRMs. The third comes from the theological-political beliefs that the group held, a blending of the Christian social gospel and progressive—perhaps even radical—politics. A final reason is that Peoples Temple changed from a religious body to a utopian experiment with the move to Jonestown. These unique dynamics make it difficult for us to generalize about NRMs from the exceptional Peoples Temple experience.

The first reason for challenging Jonestown's paradigmatic status as a dangerous cult concerns the relative importance of external in relation to internal factors in the final days of Jonestown. Should the tragedy of November 18, 1978, be blamed primarily on Jim Jones and his leadership team? Should responsibility be shared with those groups exerting pressure on the Jonestown community, namely the Temple's opponents, which included hostile relatives, critical government representatives, and a sensationalistic media? If we look at external in addition to internal factors to explain the tragedy, can we still consider Peoples Temple a good example of a dangerous cult?

These questions hint at a larger debate about the nature of new religions. Do NRMs primarily act out of internal dynamics—that is, from endogenous factors, as sociologists of religion call them? Or do they also respond, or even primarily relate, to external forces—or exogenous factors? In other words, do NRMs function according to their own internal mechanisms, oblivious to the outside world? Or do they change and adjust as a result of what is happening outside the confines of their world view, in response to negative media attention, for example, or to child custody cases? The essentialist view—the opinion that NRMs work within a cultural and social void and respond only to internal stimuli and conflicts—does not adequately consider the importance of outside influences upon Peoples Temple. Essentialists

must take this approach, because otherwise anticultists would have to take some responsibility for cult violence. But we must ask what might have happened—or not happened—if the community in Jonestown had not felt under constant attack.

A number of comparative studies of Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians followed in the wake of the confrontation between the Davidians and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Federal Bureau of Investigation at Mount Carmel, Texas, in 1993.³⁵ In several such studies, scholars wrote that, comparatively speaking, exogenous factors played a greater role in the demise of the Branch Davidians than they did in the deaths at Jonestown. After all, the Davidians confronted an armed force, whereas the residents of Jonestown faced an unarmed congressman and reporters. Others, however, believe that exogenous factors also played a significant role leading to the deaths in Jonestown. Hall, for example, consistently pointed to the threats that Concerned Relatives, and their allies in the media and the government, made against Peoples Temple, calling these groups “cultural opponents.”³⁶

I would agree that the role of cultural opponents should not be dismissed in assessing causes, or blame, for the deaths in Jonestown.³⁷ Few groups operate in a vacuum, and, given the high profile Peoples Temple had in San Francisco politics, it was impossible for it to go unnoticed, especially by the news media. Apostates (i.e., members who leave an NRM) and relatives of Temple members also sought to publicize their concerns and mounted an extensive lobbying campaign against the Temple beginning in 1976. The campaign prompted numerous government investigations, which led, at times, to serious threats against Jonestown’s very existence. For example, a letter-writing campaign alerted the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to Temple use, and abuse, of shortwave radio frequencies. The FCC investigated the Temple’s use of the radio waves and issued several complaints and citations against Temple radio operators for conducting business over the amateur airwaves. If the FCC had shut down Jonestown radio operations, the group would have had difficulty communicating its needs to its headquarters in California. Allegations of gunrunning pushed the U.S. Customs Service to conduct random searches of Temple crates being shipped to Guyana. Although these searches revealed no weapons or other customs violations, they did delay the arrival of clothing and medical supplies to the community. The Social Security Administration temporarily held up checks legitimately intended for senior citizens who moved to Jonestown. Without those funds, residents would have starved.

While Leo Ryan and those who accompanied him were, in fact, unarmed, they jointly represented the force of government and its ability to destroy Jonestown. Residents sincerely believed that Ryan and his entourage represented a grave threat to their community. The week before Ryan arrived Jones reminded the group that:

We are still in a state of siege. We are going to be under siege beginning Tuesday, when the first of the group we have found will be arriving by commercial airlines. We are hoping and feeling that the Guyana government will block them from staying longer... Their plans for the mercenaries, we do not know. We don't know if it is taking place now, or if it will start when the legal actions start, I mean their legal entry... So I wanted to warn you again and again and again, to be together with the community, to stay in the

sight of the community, do not leave the central area, do not get away from this circle of protection.³⁸

Tim Stoen, a leader of the Concerned Relatives, told the State Department he would retrieve his son, John Victor, from Jonestown “by force if necessary.” Shortly before Ryan’s visit an aide to Charles Garry, the Temple’s San Francisco lawyer, wrote to Jones that “It has become clear to me that anything Stoen’s involved in has as its goal the destruction of you (Jim Jones) and ultimately the organization.”³⁹ Jones’s anxiety about Ryan’s trip with the Concerned Relatives therefore had some legitimate basis.

Actions have consequences, and the actions of the Temple’s opponents—the Concerned Relatives and the news media—did indeed have dire consequences. To consider Peoples Temple as responding completely, or almost completely, to endogenous factors—such as Jones’s deteriorating mental health in Guyana or the declining financial status of the organization—ignores the important role opponents had in affecting that health, or precipitating that status.

It is clear that members of Peoples Temple lived and worked in a dynamic tension with antagonistic critics who were unsympathetic to the aims of the group and who had vowed to destroy Jones. None but the largest and most visible NRMs—such as the Church of Scientology or The Family/Children of God—face this kind of relentless animosity. The difference, however, was that Temple enemies seemed to have all the force and might of the American government behind them.

A second problem with making Peoples Temple the paradigmatic evil cult stems from its utterly anomalous racial composition. Analyses of NRMs in the 1980s, coming out of the study of counterculture youth movements in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on middle-class, educated, white young people. In a book on NRMs published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1989, Saul V. Levine observed that, “[w]ith few exceptions, the members are young (median age 22), white, middle-class, relatively well-educated, and from intact families.”⁴⁰ Other chapters from the same volume presuppose a youthful, white membership, including “Contemporary Youth: Their Psychological Needs and Beliefs,” and “Families of Cult Members: Consultation and Treatment.” And an example from “Religious Cult Membership: A Sociobiologic Model”:

University campuses are particular targets of cult recruiters, especially at the beginning of new academic terms. Adolescents have always been prone to sudden religious conversions.... [M]odern adolescents and college students are particularly likely to be disaffiliated from their families on one hand and from adult groups on the other.⁴¹

As early as 1978, Archie Smith Jr. criticized the dominant white paradigm for analyzing NRMs,⁴² but ten years later the APA continued to interpret cult membership as a white phenomenon. Even as recently as 1998, Lorne Dawson wrote that, “the members of most NRMs are disproportionately young,” although he does add that the figures are changing as some groups age.⁴³ Eileen Barker recognized the unusual membership profile of Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians, writing that members were “not as disproportionately young” as those in movements like the Children

of God, Hare Krishna or ISKCON, and the Unification Church of Rev. Sun Myung Moon.⁴⁴

If the psychiatrists are correct, then Peoples Temple is a bad example of a typical cult because it violates the most typical demographic norms. Though led by a white preacher, Peoples Temple was a black religious institution in terms of its numbers. Initial calculations of Jonestown victims estimated that approximately 70 percent of those who died were African American.⁴⁵ An extensive demographic survey that Fielding McGehee and I conducted broke this figure further into its constituent parts.⁴⁶ About 67 percent of the people living in Guyana—both Jonestown and Georgetown—were black; that figure reflects the percentage of those who died as well. Almost half of those who lived and died in Jonestown were black females, with the majority of those women being over age 50. There are two age “bumps” in the numbers of Jonestown residents: children under the age of 20 make up one bump, and African American adults over the age of 50 compose the other. In other words, children (including teenagers) and old people made up the majority of residents in Jonestown, in contrast to the twenty-something membership of more representative groups. Moreover, though residents of Jonestown came from a variety of jobs and professions, the majority came from the working classes, such as clerical, domestic, agricultural, and building trades, as distinct from the typical college-educated cult member.

Mary Maaga highlighted the problem of considering members of Peoples Temple as a uniform mass, whether black or white, young or old.⁴⁷ She identified three distinct groups that existed side-by-side within the organization: older whites, who had joined in Indianapolis and moved with the group to California; younger whites, who joined in California and who fit the APA profile of cult members; and a cross-section of the black community. Furthermore, my own research indicates that membership in Peoples Temple embodied numerous interlocking family relationships. In other words, everyone seemed to be related to everyone else, either by marriage, by adoption, by partnership, or by guardianship. Far from being a group of disaffected young people, Peoples Temple was a group in which members had strong biological, family, and affective ties.⁴⁸

In short, Peoples Temple looked much more like a church than an NRM in its membership. One might as well say that black churches in America are dangerous cults, given the fact that Temple demographics more closely resemble those institutions than any others. But if an NRM is by definition a countercultural youth movement, which is what the APA claimed—as do many other NRM analyses—then Peoples Temple fails as a model or warning of anything relating to NRMs.

In addition to failing the NRM demographic test, Peoples Temple fails the NRM belief test. Some analysts see the movement as fitting squarely within the paradigm of Third World anticolonial revolutions, with its work being comparable to that of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California.⁴⁹ The Temple provided meals to residential members and to others and offered health screenings for seniors, child care for working parents, and assistance in navigating the social welfare system to those in need. It also engaged in grassroots political organizing activities, ranging from

participation in demonstrations in support of fair housing, or against evictions of low-income tenants, to donation of financial aid to Dennis Banks, a leader of the American Indian Movement who was fighting extradition to South Dakota. The group made donations to the defense funds of reporters jailed for refusing to reveal sources. Speakers at Temple services included Civil Rights activists and international political figures, while topics included the American-choreographed overthrow of Salvador Allende's socialist government in Chile and the subsequent torture of dissidents, to the evils of apartheid in South Africa, as well as from the persecution of blacks in American cities and the deep South to Supreme Court decisions expanding police powers.

While many NRMs today espouse capitalistic values—such as the Church of Scientology, the Unification Church, or a number of Christian “cults”—Peoples Temple adopted countercultural economic values, namely socialism and communalism, and critiqued the rugged individualism of American life. “Jones had become an obscure socialist thinker, blending elements of atheism, Christianity, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and Third World revolutionary rhetoric into a complicated brew of political sentiments.”⁵⁰ While it seems dangerous to assume that Jones's followers shared all of their leader's beliefs and principles, nevertheless those who disagreed with the organization's politics probably left. Certainly there were older people who relied upon the Temple for food, housing, and health care, and they undoubtedly held onto some Christian traditions. But as Anthony B. Pinn notes, we should not neglect the role that “nontheism” played within the group.

It seems unlikely that African Americans would remain in Peoples Temple and Jonestown if bothered by the humanist teachings simply because they did not want to appear to be “traitors.” For some this may have been the case, but it is plausible that for others the humanist teachings rang true.⁵¹

We can see this in the comments of one member who said that, for the first time, “she had found a society free of sexism and racism and one in which she experienced full acceptance as a Black woman. She had a cause to live for. American society had never given her that.”⁵² The social and political commitments of members of Peoples Temple, therefore, are at odds with the supernaturalist beliefs of many NRMs, and with the other-worldly orientation of many black churches in America. Salvation was this-worldly, to be created in the promised land of Guyana.

Most popular discussions of Peoples Temple neglect the distinct change in its organization and purpose after the move to Jonestown. While it employed the language, the facilities, the organization, and even the beliefs of a Christian group during its Indiana and California years, it is clear that Peoples Temple functioned as a utopian community upon relocation to Guyana. Jones did not preach any Christian messages on the audiotapes recorded in Jonestown, as opposed to those taped in the United States.⁵³ Even in the so-called “Death Tape” made on the last day, it was a Temple leader, and not Jones, who assured the dying that “everybody was so happy when they made that step to the other side.”⁵⁴ There were no religious symbols in Jonestown, although there were what we might call religious rituals or rites, such as

rehearsals for suicide and testimonies of those stating their willingness to die for the community.

The traditional practice of Christianity died out in Jonestown, and religious language disappeared, although some argue that the commitment to socialism took the form of a religious obligation. Jones criticized the assembly in Jonestown for its nostalgia for long-established Christian beliefs and practices, saying, "You used to rise when you talked about heaven. You'd rise. You'd rise to your feet. You stand up and you'd wave your hand, talk about heaven. And you never saw no goddam heaven, 'cause no goddam heaven ever existed."⁵⁵ Jones added that people would have liked him better if he had driven a Cadillac and lived in a mansion than if he had told them the truth. Follow-up notes to a "Peoples Rally" held in August 1978 state what Jonestown residents are to say to visitors who ask about religion:

Church?—No, we don't "have" church here. We have town forum every week once, but never more than twice in a week. They don't like you to go if you feel bad—we have nurses that check you and watch over any who aren't well.⁵⁶

A final example of the turn from religion appears in a brochure published by Peoples Temple, called "A Feeling of Freedom," which presented photographs and comments by people who lived in or visited "The Peoples Temple Agricultural/Medical Project in Guyana, South America." The *only* reference to religion appears in a comment made by my mother, Barbara Moore, who visited the community in May 1978 but was never a member. She said, "In a sense it reminds me of ... a New Testament community, in the purest sense of the word, in the love and concern for all, that we observed."⁵⁷

The absence of familiar religious elements indicates a distinct shift in the Peoples Temple's operation, if not in its self-understanding. Hall defines a utopian group as follows:

[G]roups of three or more individuals, some of whom are unrelated by blood or marriage, who live in a single household or interrelated set of households and engage in attempts at value achievement not available in society-at-large.⁵⁸

Hall expands upon Rosabeth Moss Kanter's examination of communal commitment. Kanter identified six characteristics of utopian groups: perfectibility, order, brotherhood, merging mind and body, experimentation, and uniqueness.⁵⁹ In many respects, Jonestown follows Kanter's model. Certainly those who moved to Jonestown believed in and worked toward creating a new society. While they gave up on fighting racism and injustice in the United States, they did not surrender the dream of building a new world of brotherhood and sisterhood in Jonestown and perfecting themselves by eliminating personal racism, elitism, sexism, and classism. Such a dream required order, however, and this quest for discipline led to excesses, such as keeping people under sedation, scaring children by telling them about tigers in the Guyanese jungle, confessing sins, and even using a sensory-deprivation chamber for hard cases.

By merging mind and body, Kanter meant living life holistically, working and living for a common cause. Cultivating the land allowed for such merging, and clearly

people in Jonestown had the opportunity to integrate their political goals with the life they were leading. A spirit of experimentation accompanied this effort to live holistically. A letter from my sister Annie Moore described some of the local plants the Jonestown medical staff were testing.

We have been using papaya on wounds and I have never seen anything like it. The skin on this woman's leg ulcer all grew a layer of skin within one day with the papaya on it. It was truly amazing.⁶⁰

Charles Garry remarked with similar amazement at the fact that old people were learning Russian in Jonestown, in preparation for a move to the Soviet Union. When we visited Jonestown in 1979, our Guyanese guide showed us a venting system from the kitchen to the laundry area that someone in the community had devised for drying clothes. The sense of experimentation extended to child rearing, in which a kibbutz-like separation of children from parents emerged as a way to instill a communal ethos in the next generation. In addition, the group's commitment to racial integration led to a number of interracial partnerships and families, with the number of mixed race children apparently growing.

Other writers have recognized the utopian nature of Jonestown.⁶¹ Although a church of sorts remained in California, Jonestown itself was a utopian experiment, unusual in its commitment to true racial integration. Only a few other communes in American history, such as Koinonia Farm in Georgia, ever attempted to live a life of intentional interracial harmony.⁶² Despite the contradictions that existed in Jonestown between goal and reality, the pledge to racial equality and justice made the project unique.

Peoples Temple's uniqueness makes it a bad example of a dangerous cult. In law, unusual cases set bad precedent; in religious studies, unusual religions make bad paradigms. Peoples Temple is without question an atypical NRM. Nevertheless, anti-cultists continue to evoke the specter of a vat of poison surrounded by corpses when they talk about NRMs. For example, opponents of David Koresh linked him to Jones and predicted collective suicide by the Branch Davidians. "The central point of comparison that was repeatedly made between Waco and Jonestown concerned first the possibility and eventually the actuality of mass suicide."⁶³ When we look objectively at Jonestown and Mount Carmel, however, we see numerous differences, ranging from geographic isolation at Jonestown, to a profound respect for biblical prophecy at Mount Carmel. Moreover, there was never any discussion of suicide at Mount Carmel, although its residents expected to fight to the death at the battle of Armageddon.

Jonestown was useful to the nascent anticult movement in the 1970s and 1980s. It "provided the modern American anticult movement (hereafter ACM) with the strongest, most dramatic evidence possible of its allegations that some new religious movements ... hold an awesome destructive potential."⁶⁴ A number of leaders of the ACM in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Ted Patrick and Margaret Singer, repeatedly invoked Jonestown as the justification for advocating restrictions on both personal freedom and religious liberty. Even today, "cult watchers not only worry about

sequels but have proof of the likelihood—in the 39 members of Heaven's Gate who linked their fate to the Hale-Bopp comet, covered their bodies with purple shrouds and suffocated themselves in March 1997," according to an article on the Rick Ross Web site, an anticult source. "They say similar groups, led by megalomaniacs who believe they alone have the ear of God, likely exist but closet themselves so well they will be detected only when exploding in tragedy."⁶⁵

More recently, Jonestown and Jones were identified with al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden, with a San Francisco reporter writing after September 11, 2001 that "one way to understand the cult of bin Laden is to look back on the horrors of Jonestown."⁶⁶ A number of editorialists and correspondents linked the Taliban with Jonestown, and Jim Jones with Osama bin Laden. Any type of religious fanaticism that involves suicide, no matter how different or unusual, now seems to be associated with Jonestown. Even the expression "drinking the Kool-Aid" means showing one's unwavering loyalty—to a product, to a sports team, or to an idea.

A final reason Peoples Temple must be considered unusual is its demise. A cataclysmic and violent end is the exception, rather than the rule, for NRMs, despite the impression we might get from events of the 1990s and our own century, such as the Aum Shinrikyo gas attack in Tokyo (1995), the murder-suicides of members of the Solar Temple (1994, 1995, 1997) in Canada and Switzerland, the Heaven's Gate UFO-related suicides (1997), or the mass deaths of 800 members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Uganda (2000). These are unusual and dramatic events, however, given the thousands of NRMs that exist around the world. NRMs typically exist for only about a generation; groups that exist into the second and third generations are considered unusually successful. Very few NRMs die out as dramatically as the groups noted above. That is why Peoples Temple and Jonestown do not make for a very good paradigm when attempting to describe a typical NRM.

THE FUTURE

It might seem that all there is to say about Peoples Temple has been said, but this is far from the case. As more Temple documents are released from government agencies through *Freedom of Information Act* requests, scholars gain new insights into the workings of the organization. As additional relatives, apostates, survivors, and others reflect upon their experiences in Jonestown, fresh perspectives augment our understanding. As other incidents of religious violence occur, comparative studies will shed new light on the events in Jonestown.

Almost three decades after Jonestown, books and articles (like this one) are still coming out. In 2005 Denice Stephenson, an archivist for the California Historical Society, published selections from the society's Peoples Temple collection.⁶⁷ That same year, a play called *The People's Temple* premiered in the San Francisco Bay area. Several authors are writing novels featuring different characters from Jonestown. A number of Peoples Temple survivors (as opposed to critical former members) are

writing their own accounts. Children's books, conspiracy books, Internet sites, works of art, and other productions continue to emerge. In the absence of a definitive explanation of "what happened" and, equally important, "why," it is likely that Jonestown will generate more and more works in the future, and so the interpretation of events will persist.

In addition to getting more analyses that compare Peoples Temple to other alternative religious groups, I think there is a need for further study of Jonestown as a utopian community. Viewing Peoples Temple as a utopian experiment will help broaden historical studies of American utopian and communal groups. It can extend our appreciation of the institution and its aims and practices and provide new ways of interpreting the group.

Pinn argues that considering Peoples Temple as a black religious institution illuminates the organization in important ways.⁶⁸ The volume *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America* has begun the process of recasting Peoples Temple in this way, but more research and analysis need to be done. For example, only a few accounts describing the experiences of black members of the Temple have been published.⁶⁹ More are forthcoming, but additional critical analyses would help fix Peoples Temple within black religious studies.

A topic that remains unexplored is that of the role of Peoples Temple ex-members, or apostates. Although a number of former, disaffected Temple members have written accounts of their experiences within the group, none have reflected on their activities—whether on their own or as part of a larger organized effort—to bring media and government pressure on the organization.⁷⁰ It is an important part of the Jonestown story, and it is still missing.

Finally, until all government documents concerning Peoples Temple are released for public consideration, the complete story of the institution will never be fully told. In 1979 the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives classified 20 chapters of material it had accumulated in its investigation of the assassination of Leo Ryan. Those chapters have never been seen by researchers. In addition, the FBI and the CIA maintain the secret classification of agency documents pertaining to Peoples Temple and Jonestown. When those documents are made available by statute in 2009, a fuller understanding of the American government's role in the tragedy will be possible. The documents may allay the suspicions of conspiracy theorists, or they may reveal that the federal government knew about the impending disaster, and perhaps even provoked it. Whatever these classified documents contain, their release will almost certainly revise academic considerations and public policy debate on Jonestown and NRMs in general.

The saga of Peoples Temple continues to unfold as former members tell their stories, as more documents become available, and as a younger generation of scholars brings new questions to old data. It is difficult to say whether or not new discoveries will dramatically change our understanding of Jonestown, however, since Jonestown seems destined to remain a symbol of dangerous cults, even if in reality it parallels other American social and cultural institutions.

I would like to thank my research associate, Fielding M. McGehee III, for his help in researching and editing this paper.

NOTES

1. Those killed at the airstrip included Rep. Leo J. Ryan, San Francisco *Examiner* photographer Greg Robinson, NBC News cameraman Bob Brown, NBC News reporter Don Harris, and departing Jonestown resident Patricia Parks.
2. 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), 17, 25.
3. FBI Audiotape Q 1058 (part 2), dated to early 1960s. All audiotapes cited in this paper are available at <http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/tapes/tapes.html>, unless otherwise noted. The tapes, generated by Temple members in the United States and Guyana, are part of a collection gathered by the FBI and obtained under the *Freedom of Information Act*.
4. John R. Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 25.
5. Jim Hougan, "Jonestown: The Secret Life of Jim Jones: A Parapolitical Fugue," *Lobster* 37 (Summer 1999): 2–20.
6. Mary McCormack Maaga, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 80–81.
7. Tanya Hollis, "Peoples Temple and Housing Politics in San Francisco," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Rebecca Moore, Anthony B. Pinn, and Mary R. Sawyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).
8. Q 1053 (part 4), dated to early 1960s.
9. David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown*, rev. ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 53.
10. *Ibid.*, 59–60.
11. Q 1059 (part 1), dated to spring 1973, quoted in Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 61.
12. Milmon F. Harrison, "Jim Jones and Black Worship Traditions," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer, 129.
13. Q 162, 1976.
14. Duchess Harris and Adam John Waterman, "To Die for the Peoples Temple: Religion and Revolution after Black Power," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer, 105.
15. Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land*, 36.
16. J. Alfred Smith, "Breaking the Silence: Reflections of a Black Pastor," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer, 147.
17. Dick Tropp, "Who are the People of Jonestown?" in *Dear People: Remembering Jonestown*, ed. Denice Stephenson (San Francisco and Berkeley: California Historical Society and Heyday Books, 2005), 82.
18. Catherine (Hyacinth) Thrash, as told to Marian K. Towne, *The Onliest One Alive: Surviving Jonestown, Guyana* (Indianapolis: M. Towne, 1995), 93.
19. Mary R. Sawyer, "The Church in Peoples Temple," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer.
20. See, for example, transcripts of agricultural meetings on Q 736, Q 741, Q 743, and Q 807. Brief summaries prepared by the FBI of other Jonestown meetings, which seem to

include agricultural reports, are available at <http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/AboutJonestown/Tapes/Tapes/FBISummaries/fbi.html>.

21. Transcripts of news reports are available of the following tapes: Q 235, Q 284, Q 320, Q 323, and Q 759.
22. Transcripts of disciplinary proceedings can be read of tapes Q 595, Q 598, Q 635–639, Q 743, and Q 807.
23. Harris and Waterman, "To Die for the Peoples Temple," 112.
24. Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 130.
25. *Ibid.*, 147.
26. Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land*, 298.
27. Q 245, October 1978.
28. Q 594, April 1978.
29. Q 048, November 17, 1978.
30. Maaga, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown*, 127–29.
31. After serving a total of 18 years—first in a Guyana jail, and then in U.S. federal penitentiaries—Layton was paroled on the recommendations of the man who disarmed him and the federal probation officer who originally recommended a sentence of five years to the judge in the case.
32. Transcripts of the so-called "Death Tape," Q 042, are available at <http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/tapes/death.html>.
33. Hougan, "Jonestown: The Secret Life of Jim Jones," 3–5.
34. Rebecca Moore, *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 329.
35. 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), 236–59; Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "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), 261–84; 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), 139–69; and Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed*; Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000); and Catherine Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000).
36. Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land*, 184–90, 210–35, 242–47; Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed*, 16–43. Thomas Robbins disagrees with this analysis in "Comparing Incidents of Extreme 'Cult Violence': A Comment on 'Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed,'" *Nova Religio* 5, no. 2 (September 2002): 372–82. My rebuttal to Dr. Robbins follows on 383–85. Catherine Wessinger offers a middle position between Hall and Robbins, in *How the Millennium Comes Violently*.
37. Rebecca Moore, "The Vise," in *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown*, chap. 11; and Rebecca Moore, "'American as Cherry Pie': Peoples Temple and Violence in America," in Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 121–37.
38. Stephenson, *Dear People: Remembering Jonestown*, 108, 110.

39. Pat Richartz, quoted in Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land*, 260.
40. Saul V. Levine, "Life in the Cults," in *Cults and the New Religious Movements: A Report of the American Psychiatric Association*, ed. Marc Galanter (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1989), 100.
41. Brant Wenegrat, "Religious Cult Membership: A Sociobiologic Model," in *Cults and the New Religious Movements*, ed. Galanter, 200.
42. 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), 209–19.
43. Lorne Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86. He goes on to comment on the educational and class status of "typical" members, noting that they come "disproportionately from middle- to upper-middle-class households," 88.
44. Eileen Barker, "New Religious Movements: Their Incidence and Significance," in *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, ed. Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 21.
45. Archie Smith Jr., *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 229–31.
46. Rebecca Moore, "Demographics and the Black Religious Culture of Peoples Temple," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer.
47. Maaga, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown*, 74–86; see also <http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/articles/three.html>.
48. Moore, "Demographics and the Black Religious Culture of Peoples Temple" in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer.
49. Harris and Waterman, "To Die for the Peoples Temple," 103–22.
50. *Ibid.*, 106.
51. Anthony B. Pinn, "Peoples Temple as Black Religion: Re-imagining the Contours of Black Religious Studies," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Moore, Pinn, and Sawyer, 15–16.
52. Archie Smith Jr., "We Need to Press Forward: Black Religion and Jonestown, Twenty Years Later," published 1998 at <http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/AboutJonestown/Articles/smith.htm>.
53. With 750 voice tapes available, and about one-fifth transcribed, it is possible this might change.
54. Q 042.
55. Q 596a, date unknown.
56. Stephenson, *Dear People: Remembering Jonestown*, 86.
57. "A Feeling of Freedom," in the Moore Family Papers, MS 3802, at the California Historical Society.
58. John R. Hall, "Social Organization and Pathways of Commitment: Types of Communal Groups, Rational Choice Theory, and the Kanter Thesis," *American Sociological Review* 53 (October 1988): 680.
59. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 32–54. Jonathan G. Andelson criticizes Kanter's model as being too static in "Coming Together and Breaking Apart: Sociogenesis and Schismogenesis in Intentional Communities," in *Intentional*

- Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Susan Love Brown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 131–51.
60. Rebecca Moore, *The Jonestown Letters: Correspondence of the Moore Family 1970–1985* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 182.
61. Gairdner B. Moment, "From Utopia to Dystopia: The Jonestown Tragedy," in *Utopias: The American Experience*, ed. Gairdner B. Moment and Otto F. Kraushaar (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 215–28; Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land*, 175–77, 190–97, 206–209. I discuss Jonestown as a utopia in a chapter called "Jonestown, U.S.A." in *A Sympathetic History of Jonestown* and there claim that "[a] more accurate description of the people and organization would be 'utopianist.'" My thinking has not changed since 1985; indeed, I have become more convinced that the nature of Peoples Temple changed dramatically as a result of the move to Guyana (183).
62. We might consider the mass, interethnic marriages of the Unification Church in a similar vein, but interracialism is a by-product rather than a goal of Rev. Sun-Myung Moon's universalist theology.
63. James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 159.
64. Anson Shupe, David G. Bromley, and Edward F. Breschel, "The Peoples Temple, the Apocalypse at Jonestown, and the Anti-Cult Movement," 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), 153.
65. Tom Kiskan, "The Power of Persuasion: 900 Deaths Left an Unforgettable Legacy," *Ventura County Star*, November 18, 1998, <http://rickross.com/reference/scientology/Scien78.html>.
66. Don Lattin, "Chilling Parallels to the Rev. Jim Jones," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 30, 2001, News.
67. See n. 17.
68. Pinn, "Peoples Temple as Black Religion."
69. Hyacinth Thrash's as-told-to account, *The Onliest One Alive*, as well as Stanley Clayton's in Kenneth Wooden, *The Children of Jonestown* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981); and Odell Rhodes's in Ethan Feinsod, *Awake in a Nightmare: Jonestown: The Only Eyewitness Account* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).
70. A number of important first-person apostate accounts include the following: Jeannie Mills, *Six Years with God: Life Inside Rev. Jim Jones's Peoples Temple* (New York: A & W Publishers, 1979); Bonnie Thielmann and Dean Merrill, *The Broken God* (Elgin, IL: David Cook, 1979); and Deborah Layton, *Seductive Poison: A Survivor's Tale of Life and Death in the Peoples Temple* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1998).

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