

## PEOPLE'S TEMPLE:

## A REVITALIZATION MOVEMENT IN DESPAIR

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Introduction

The People's Temple was a revitalization movement which responded to the failure of American culture to provide a meaningful life for a segment of the population. To understand the dynamics of the Temple we must first look at the role such movements play in a given society.

It has long been a contention of Western thought that people are born into this world as tabulae rasae or blank slates. While other animals are born with an instinctual understanding of the world and their role in it, human beings define the world through acceptance of the typologies, constructs, and values placed upon it by their parents and ancestors (Schlegel 1979). These typologies, constructs and values can be defined as culture--a long, fluctuating process passed on and modified from generation to generation.

Culture seeks to define the world so that we who are born into something we cannot initially understand may function in, and derive meaning from, life. The culture into which we are born dictates our perceptions of the world. Though it is often taken as truth, culture is a human-created reality which is not necessarily truthful. Rather, our culturally-constructed world provides us with meaning, order and certainty, a set of understandings by which we can coherently experience the unknown.

Without a culturally-constructed world we are left with no structure for our activities and no basis for an understanding of the people and objects around us. We are left with a shapeless, meaningless world. Our cultural constructions serve in large part to shield us from this meaninglessness, from existential angst and the stress it creates. Yet even with a culturally-constructed world we are at times subject to angst, moments in which our confidence is shaken by doubts as to the verity and meaning of our human-created values and institutions. For those who find this angst too unsettling to deal with, religion serves as a mechanism by which we can confirm the truth of our human-created realities. It grounds our typologies and constructs in an all-powerful transcendent order, thus legitimating our cultural constructions as truth. It essentially gives us the faith in ourselves that angst denies us.

At times, however, a culture, including its established religion(s), may not hold sufficient meaning for a segment of the population. A minority group, for example, may be prevented from fully participating in meaning-giving activities: status, wealth, education and justice may be denied to them. Others may find that the meaning-giving activities in a culture are, to them, meaningless and shallow. It is when the culture-created world seems problematic, unfair and prejudicial that the initial faith placed in it by an individual raised to believe in it begins to fade. As the culture-created world becomes less and less satisfying, it becomes less truthful, and no longer acts as a shield against meaninglessness. The resulting angst, often combined with physical and social conditions, causes severe stress in the individual. That, in turn, causes him to seek a new context within which to understand and function in the world. Cults that arise in such times of crisis, known as millenarian or revitalization movements, offer such a new human-created world.

Anthony F. C. Wallace defines a revitalization movement as "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (1956:265). Though both mainstream religions and revitalization movements are grounded in the transcendent, religions seek to legitimate the cultural structure while revitalization movements seek to change it.

Wallace notes that every individual maintains an image of the world called "the mazeway"--an image of nature, society, culture, personality and the personal body (1956:266). This image is essentially the culturally-constructed world internalized into an individual's consciousness as objective reality. If that reality remains meaningful, an individual is likely to remain satisfied with the society in which he lives. But, Wallace notes,

Whenever an individual who is under chronic, psychologically measurable stress, receives repeated information which indicates that his mazeway does not lead to action which reduces the level of stress, he must choose between maintaining his present mazeway and tolerating the stress, or changing the mazeway in an attempt to reduce the stress (Ibid., 266-267).

Such stress can be the result of cultural disruption, as was the case when Europeans arrived in Melanesia. Attempts to reduce the stress can take the form of nativistic movements or movements which promise messianic intervention that will restore the past stability and predominance of the threatened culture.<sup>1</sup> This form of stress can also be the result of the exclusion of certain groups from meaningful participation in society, and the disenchantment of others with the standards and values of the society. These were the major factors that influenced the growth of People's Temple, as will be discussed below.

What the Temple Promised  
And Why People Joined

The People's Temple, associated with the Disciples of Christ, was established in 1956 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Its young pastor, Jim Jones, was dedicated to establishing a bi-racial place of worship in a city unfriendly to racial integration. His outspoken support of racial equality resulted in threats on his life and abuse from local racists (Kilduff and Javers 1978:15-20).

This dedication to racial justice was a cornerstone of the Temple's ideology. Later, on the West Coast, Jones grew interested in Marxism, became familiar with the concept of alienation, and rejected Christianity. In 1977 he wrote, "Neither my colleagues nor I are any longer caught up in the opiate of religion" (Krause 1978:208).

By the time the settlement at Jonestown was established, People's Temple promised a communist utopia. Writing from Jonestown, Jones explained that his commune was an alternative to the "mediocrity, apathy and indifference that are the order of the day" in a "regimented and tense highly technological society." "Cooperative living provides such security," he wrote. "It provides the structure to see that everyone's needs are met. It maximizes everyone's own individual creativity and allows time for pursuit of individual interests. . . . We have passed beyond alienation and have found a way of living that nurtures trust--one that could speak to a society grown cynical and cold."

Jones went on to describe how his commune lived "beyond alienation": classes were (supposedly) offered in rugmaking, canning, crafts, carpentry, welding, medicine, music, art and "myriad academic subjects." People were well-fed and enjoyed "every type of" sport and recreational activity. Senior citizens were free from ageism, children from bad dreams, and everyone from racism and sexism. "We have found security and fulfillment in collectivism," wrote Jones, "and we can help build a peaceful agricultural nation" (Krause 1978:205-210).

This promise of a life "beyond alienation" attracted hundreds to Jonestown. For some, alienated by what they saw as the racism and other injustices rampant in American society, People's Temple was a vehicle for change. In describing why they joined the Temple, surviving members frequently pointed to what they felt was the Temple's humanitarian mission:

"He [Jones] was so involved with humanitarian things. He really cared about people and would do anything to help," recalled Jackie Swinney (Kilduff 1978:68).

"We went into the group thinking it was a very warm, loving family," said Al Mills. "It was a beautiful and cohesive group. I was always involved in civil rights activity myself." Mills went on

to note that he and his wife were impressed with Jones' apparent commitment to progressive politics (Krause 1978:55).

"She was excited about the political potential of the mission; she thought it could change the world. She was no fool; she was very smart but she was also very alone in the world," said Becky Jenkins of her friend Sharon Amos who died in Guyana (Shinoff 1978:C).

Others found the Temple to be a world which gave structure and meaning to their lives:

"I was 18 years old when I joined. . . . I had grown up in affluent circumstances in the permissive atmosphere of Berkeley, California. By joining the People's Temple I hoped to help others and in the process bring structure and self-discipline to my own life," wrote Deborah Blakey in an affidavit to the U.S. Department of Justice (Krause 1978:187).

Odell Rhodes, a black who taught crafts at Jonestown, had been a heroin addict before joining the Temple. A friend of his had joined and now "looked like a successful businessman." Rhodes was introduced to Jones, who "gave me a new self-image" (Cahill 1979:52).

Most of the existing statements concerning motivations for joining the Temple have been made by white defectors. The majority of Temple members were black, however, and their reasons for joining can only be deduced. Clearly the dream of racial equality had something to do with it, and the Temple served to alleviate the stress racial injustice had caused.

"One night Archie Ijames [Jones' black second-in-command at Redwood Valley] stayed up until early morning telling me stories of persecution and prejudice. He was willing to forgive the white man. I went to my bed and cried," wrote Phil Kerns (1979:58). Another statement, written to Jones and found among the confessional "Letters to Dad," contained this message:

I have a desire to speak out about the injustice of the oppressed people around the world, but if I had to go anyplace it would be back to the States to fight in the streets if necessary for the freedom of black people and would gladly die. Dad, I do not want my living to be in vain.

In addition to alienation from the American mainstream and a desire to alleviate the stress caused by racial injustice, Jones' own personal magnetism was a factor in motivating people to join the Temple. Mills noted that

Jones was so charismatic that he could talk at one meeting to very religious people about healings and at another to very political people about social justice. You heard what you wanted to hear.

I knew that some of the healings were phony and staged (Krause 1978:55).

Others, however, believed that Jones was a faith healer and had psychic powers. Those qualities perceived as his charisma, whether religious or political, served to attract people to the Temple. Phil Kerns noted that his mother had once written, "He [Jones] fills an empty spot in my life" (1979:55).

In sum, the available information as to why people joined the Temple points to three main reasons. First, for those who had come to regard mainstream American culture as shallow, it offered an opportunity to gain a sense of purpose by seeking to reform, or revitalize, the society. Secondly, for blacks excluded from full participation and a sense of belonging in the mainstream culture, it provided a secure niche which offered a new set of values, typologies and constructs which addressed the problems of racism and economic inequality. Lastly, Jones was perceived as a helpful, caring person who gave direction and purpose to the lives of his followers.

Had the Temple and its jungle settlement been all that its public relations people said it was, it might today be a positive example of human beings working together to create a meaningful world. That is not the case, however, and the ultimate failure of People's Temple must be traced to the psychology of Jim Jones.

#### Jim Jones: Life History

By all accounts, Jones had an unusual youth. Born on May 13, 1931, he was raised in the small town of Lynn, Indiana. His mother supported the family by working in a factory and doing odd jobs on the side. His father, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, was unable to work due to poor health. Jones, according to at least one account, "grew up on the streets" (Kilduff and Javers 1978:10).

Descriptions of Jones by childhood friends, classmates, teachers and neighbors fall into two categories. First, there is the lonely, even antisocial Jones who wanted to be in control of the people around him. One neighbor described him as "the Dennis the Menace of Lynn" because of Jones' habit of walking by his house and shouting such things as "Good morning, you son of a bitch" (Trounstine 1978:4). His play habits were also unusual. "We used to pretend church and he'd be the preacher," said one Lynn resident, who noted that Jones "baptized" other children in a local creek (Trounstine 1978:4). A classmate remarked that "If Jim wasn't going to be the leader, he wasn't going to do it," and a teacher said that "When Jim was crossed he got emphatic" (Kilduff and Javers 1978:11). Many who commented on the young Jones also mentioned his introversion. "He kind of stayed to himself," said a high school classmate (Trounstine 1978:4). His college roommate said he was "maladjusted

and ignored," and considered himself above everyone else and pored over the Bible, often rambling about his religious philosophies" (Kilduff and Javers 1978:14).

But a second portrait of Jones emerges, a portrait of someone lonely but capable of kindness. One relative recalled that "He picked up all the strays in town. If a bird fell with a broken wing, he'd keep it in a cage until it got well." He even held funerals for pets (Trounstone 1978:4). Another source noted that Jones once befriended an unemployed, depressed man and found him a job (Kilduff and Javers 1978:12).

In 1950, after having dropped out of Indiana University, Jones took his new wife Marceline to Indianapolis, where he began to pastor at several churches. Initially he met with failure, due to his open advocacy of racial integration. By 1956, however, he had enough support to open a bi-racial church: the People's Temple. During this time he also adopted several black and Asian children.

As his congregation grew, Jones became impressed with the methods of a well-known charismatic preacher of the time, Father Divine.<sup>2</sup> Jones borrowed one of Divine's methods for policing his congregation known as the interrogation committee. By the 1970's this committee had become the "Planning Commission," a group that used beatings, spying and other such tactics to control Temple members.

In 1963 Jones claimed to have a prophecy in which a coming nuclear holocaust would destroy much of the world. He led some of his followers to Redwood Valley, near Ukiah, California, a place Esquire magazine had described as safe in the event of a nuclear war (Kilduff and Javers 1978:15-21; Trounstone 1978:5). Jones and his followers arrived in 1965 and proceeded to ingratiate themselves into the community. In 1967 Jones began to move away from Christianity, urging Temple members to follow his example by throwing the Bible on the floor. Some were put off by such actions, but for the most part they stayed on for a few years more because, as it was stated by one woman, "I really believed in Jim."

It was at Redwood Valley that People's Temple began to take on a rigid form in which loyalty and dedication to Jones became paramount. It was also at this time that Jones began using drugs and wearing dark glasses to shield his eyes. One woman recalled that "Jim was just like a normal human being when we first came" to Redwood Valley in 1970, but that by 1972 he had changed. Even in 1970 former Temple members reported that he began indulging in small cruelties, such as forcing a child to eat until he vomited, and then forcing him to eat the vomit. In 1971 public beatings during church services began. Jones also began to fear conspiracies against his life and in 1973 erected a guard tower near his home (Saylor 1978:1, 16-17; Kilduff and Javers 1978:28-38; Kerns 1979:33-93).

Though some people left the Temple, the vast majority moved with Jones to San Francisco in 1972. Many who had known Jones in his earlier, saner days accepted his new excesses as less important than the good work they perceived him as accomplishing. To others, Jones had become superhuman. He fostered this image by faith healing in which he claimed to have removed "cancerous tissue," but actually held up chicken livers to the audience (Kilduff and Javers 1978:65-67), and by "psychic powers" in which he told people things they felt he could not have known about them. In the case of the latter, loyal Temple members would search a person's house and even their trash to find information which Jones would later claim to have perceived psychically (Greenberg 1979:379).

In San Francisco Jones refined the tactics he had begun in Redwood Valley, many of which he brought with him to Jonestown. As the press grew more interested in the stories told by defectors, Jones isolated himself more and more from the real world. He left in late 1977 for Guyana and the jungle-shrouded Jonestown settlement.

#### The Psychology of Jim Jones

Though no extensive study of Jones' psychology exists, two major points can be identified through existing accounts of his life and his actions. First, Jones was unable to come to terms with his own sexuality. Second, Jones was disenchanted with the mainstream culture and sought a more fulfilling life by trying to change it. Jones was raised at a time when a man derived much of his self-worth from being heterosexual. But Jones himself was bisexual.<sup>3</sup> Temple defectors relate accounts of his lust for both men and women, and it was a mark of status within the Temple to be singled out by him (Kilduff and Javers 1978:53-57).

In spite of his sexual affairs with men, Jones denied that he had homosexual tendencies. One member noted that "Jones used to say that the only perfect heterosexual around was him. All of [the rest of] us had to admit we were homosexuals [to please him]." Jones began covert homosexual activities as early as 1968, and they became overt (within the Temple) after the congregation had moved to San Francisco (Kilduff and Javers 1978:54).

University of Miami psychologist Jose Lasaga analyzed Jones' schizophrenic sexual personality as follows:

Everyone had to say he [Jones] was the only true heterosexual man in the world . . . to compensate for his feelings of inferiority. He was bisexual but he "hated" homosexuals--as he demonstrated by punishing them. Therefore, he hated himself . . . there was tremendous cognitive dissonance (Greenberg 1979:382).

This self-hatred, due in part to his sexual problems, was to make itself evident during the days immediately preceding the mass suicides, as well be discussed below.

On a conscious level, Jones shared much of the disenchantment with mainstream American culture that his followers did. Most press accounts, books, and analyses of Jonestown contain references to his hatred of capitalism, racism, and alienation.<sup>4</sup>

During the early 1950's, preaching was one of the few socially-sanctioned outlets for urging a change in society toward equality, loving thy neighbor, and racial justice.<sup>5</sup> Though some of Jones' political and moral rhetoric was undoubtedly designed to cajole and intimidate his followers, sincerity on his part toward solving major social problems during the early days of his ministry cannot be denied. In spite of threats and constant abuse, Jones continued to work for racial justice in the 1950's (Kilduff and Javers 1978: 18-20).

Jones seems to fit Erikson's definition of a leader, in which a person internalizes the social conflicts of his time and seeks to resolve those conflicts by resolving the conflicts of the world (Erikson 1958:109-110, 261-262). By attempting to resolve the social conflicts of his time, Jones derived meaning and sense of purpose. Yet while he did purposeful work on the conscious level, his deeper sexual conflicts remained unresolved. He did not preach acceptance of homosexual behavior as an attempt to solve the conflicts within himself. As he began to give vent to his homosexuality in the late 1960's, it is likely that his feelings of inferiority increased all the more. To make up for increased feelings of inferiority, Jones turned to increased megalomania, and proceeded, through every tactic imaginable, to set himself up as a god. And as he grew more exploitative and manipulative, the difference between his actions and beliefs grew, causing cognitive dissonance which contributed even more to his own self-hatred.

Drugs were one method by which Jones attempted to cope with his self-hatred, doubts and insecurities. (The literature suggests that he used amphetamines.) Press accounts and Temple defectors noted that Jones was a heavy user of drugs (Kilduff and Javers 1978:57-58; Willse 1978:1-2). Temple lawyer Charles Garry reported that shortly before the mass suicides Jones had "fevers as high as 105.5 degrees . . . and was using a great deal of medication. He was literally burning his brain" (Bartlett 1978:2). Both the fevers and a decade of constant drug use took their toll on Jones' abilities to reason and cope.

The stress of his own internal conflicts and his use of drugs led Jones to withdraw from reality. As early as 1967 Jones claimed to fear U.S. government-sponsored conspiracies to destroy the Temple (Kerns 1979:61-62). Whether he actually feared such conspiracies or used them to instill fear in his congregation is unclear. But the establishment of a guard tower near his home in 1973 indicates that



he may have begun to take them seriously. In the closing few years of the Temple, Jones talked constantly of plots and conspiracies, and his discussion of such seemed to intensify with his mental decline (Krause 1978:188, 208-210; Kilduff and Javers 1978:96-97 et passim; Tape of Jones' order to die).

In late 1977, whether real or imagined, Jones claimed that a CIA-FBI-Interpol-media conspiracy was trying to destroy the Temple. He subsequently fled to Guyana, shortly after New West magazine published a critical account of Temple life (Kilduff and Javers 1978:96-97).

The "People's Temple Agricultural Station" at Jonestown provided Jones with an isolated environment in which he could tightly control the lives of his followers and thus cement their relationship to him as one of mere mortals to God. It provided a closed-off world in which he could indulge his megalomania, his fantasies and his use of drugs. As his own divinity, or his followers' belief in it, became increasingly important to him, the measures taken to insure the strict loyalty of his flock, and thus the safety of his isolated world, grew more severe (see Appendix A). But Jones' isolation meant that he could no longer temper his self-hatred with the self-worth felt from pursuing changes in the real world. His divinity fantasies were a substitute for that self-worth, and could not hold up under the test of reality.

The visit of Leo Ryan's ill-fated party was such a reality. Jones did everything he could to prevent Ryan's visit, perhaps aware that it would lead to the mass suicides (Javers 1978:1; Draper 1978:1). Jones had admitted publicly, shortly before leaving San Francisco in 1977, that he felt suicidal. In a speech organized ironically by the Ad Hoc Committee for Suicide Prevention, Jones outlined what he saw as the causes of suicide:

Basic human values, basic decency, kindness, cooperation are less and less evident. Economic pressures and psychological pressures mount. More and more individuals feel unhappiness--and helpless--in their acquisitiveness for pleasure and accumulation in this selfish society.

They turn to artificial stimulants. They lose touch with themselves. Their problems, their insecurities mount, and become despondency.

Jones went on to claim that "one magazine in particular" was persecuting his church (New West) and then launched into a description of how his son had threatened to commit suicide. He said they had "worked our way through that, but I think we all should identify closely with that kind of personal experience, because at one time or another we have all felt the alienation and the despair." He continued: "I think the despair got to me yesterday. I have been

in a suicidal mood myself today for perhaps the first time in my life" (Pimsleur 1978:2).

Jones' mention of artificial stimulants, insecurities mounting, despondency, alienation, and despair applied to him as well as to those he was speaking of, and he was probably aware of it.

During the year following this speech, Jones organized suicide rituals called "white nights." This clearly demonstrates that suicide was on his mind. The "white nights" were ostensibly conducted as practice for the real thing in case Jonestown was attacked by the CIA, FBI, or Guyanese military. But Jones may well have been aware, even in his deteriorated condition, that the real or major threat came from media exposure of his and his Temple's activities. That was precisely what Ryan's party threatened. On the first day of their two day visit, Jones made some startling comments about his own mental state and the Ryan visit:

And then they say I want power. . . . I hate power, I hate money. The only thing I wish now is that I was never born. All I want is peace. I'm not worried about my image. If we could just stop it. But if we don't I don't know what's going to happen to 1,200 lives here (Kilduff and Javers 1978:48).

The threat of suicide is implicit in the above statement as is his concern about the press. Though claiming he was not worried about his image, Jones obviously was, and threatened that unless "we could just stop it" (investigation into the Temple and tarnishing his image), the lives of Jonestown's residents would be endangered.<sup>6</sup>

Also of import is Jones' statement that all he wanted was peace. That, combined with the following statements he made on the first day of Ryan's visit, shows a man reconciling himself to, and yearning for, death: "I curse the day I was born"; "I don't know why people hate me so. They can have me but they should leave these people peace"; "In some ways I feel like a dying man" (Reiterman 1978:18).

On the second and last day of the Ryan visit, Jones repeated those sentiments: "The only thing I want now is to never have been born. I feel more so every day. I'm not worried about my image anymore. I want to have never been born" (Kilduff and Javers 1978:163).

The straw that broke the camel's back occurred on the second day. Twelve Temple members announced that they planned to leave with Ryan. This came as a severe blow to Jones, who at one point pulled them aside and tried to convince them to stay. After Jones found out about their planned defection, he told one reporter that "This is rubbish. I'm defeated. I might as well die. . . . They

will try to destroy us. They'll try. They always lie when they leave"<sup>7</sup> (Krause 1978:71).

The Ryan visit signaled the beginning of the end of Jonestown's isolation, and the beginning of the scrutiny that would lead to its downfall. Aware of this, manipulated by forces within himself that he could not understand, somewhat aware of the atrocities he had committed, his feelings and fears heightened by drugs and illness, and hating himself, Jones lost his ability to cope with life. His megalomaniacal fantasies could not withstand this stress, and facing meaninglessness, purposelessness, and disgrace, Jones chose suicide.

His comments urging his followers to commit suicide were taped and offer proof:

Please, for God's sake let's get on with it. We've lived. . . . Let's just be done with it, let's be done with the agony of it. . . . I tell you, I don't care how many screams you hear. I don't care how many anguished cries. Death is a million times preferable to ten more days of this life. . . . Take our life from us. We laid it down. We got tired. We didn't commit suicide. We committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhuman world.<sup>8</sup>

Why Jones chose to take his followers with him into death is one of the bigger mysteries of the People's Temple puzzle. None of the existing accounts of the Temple and its leader contains any factual information in this regard, and our analysis must be purely speculative. There are four possible answers:

Firstly, since Jones was very much concerned with his place in history, it is possible that the survival of his followers would lead to further press investigations into his practices and personality, thus blackening his name.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, Jones may have felt that the deaths of his followers would add weight to his own and grab the world's attention in a way that his lone death might not. Thirdly, Jones may have wanted to take his flock with him as a vengeful act. Jones often stated that they were his burden. In talking about those who defected from the Temple, Jones may have also been referring to his feelings about those still loyal: "Threat, threat, threat of extinction. I wish I wasn't born at times. I understand hate. Love and hate are very close. They can have me"<sup>10</sup> (Kilduff and Javers 1978:47-48). Finally, in some contorted, deranged way, Jones may have felt that pushing his flock to suicide was a loving act. Perhaps he realized their defenselessness and dependency and felt that the "peace" of death would be kinder to them than the letdown of living without him and discovering who and what he really was.

At any rate, Jones encouraged his followers to kill themselves, and the next area of investigation must be why they chose to die.

The Psychology of Jones' Followers

Most of Jones' followers chose to die, believing their deaths to be acts of revolutionary suicide.<sup>11</sup> Dying for such an (imagined) cause places them within Durkheim's definition of altruistic suicide (Durkheim 1951:220-240). Durkheim delineates the conditions necessary for such suicides as follows: they take place in a tightly controlled, well integrated society in which the individual has little value and the "ego is not its own property." Such societies teach subordination to the leader, and the man who renounces life on the provocation of circumstance is praiseworthy. Altruistic suicide is heroic suicide, and revolutionary suicide was considered heroic in the People's Temple.

Durkheim's description of altruistic suicide fits People's Temple perfectly. First, People's Temple was tightly controlled and well integrated. Jones controlled his flock by exhausting them mentally and physically, using physical force, and breaking down family ties (see Appendix A). Jones became master of the group, and the main purpose in the life of his followers was doing as he said. This is effectively illustrated by the "Letters to Dad." One in particular reveals the importance accorded individuals within the group:

During that first crisis, I said, "I'll never see my brothers or sisters again or my mother." What I was really saying was I'm not ready to die yet. It was not that I was scared. I was not willing to take a responsibility to do something good for once. I was not thinking about Dad [Jones]. I was thinking of self, something that don't mean anything.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Jones convinced his flock that to renounce life on the provocation of circumstance was praiseworthy. He consistently primed them with paranoid visions of assassinations and assaults that would be made against the Temple. In urging them to commit suicide, Jones warned that the Guyanese army would arrive unless they acted quickly, and he had previously warned that the Guyanese would torture and kill Jonestown residents when they did so. An act of revolutionary suicide in such circumstances was considered heroic (see Appendices A and B).

Jones had previously prepared his flock for the eventuality of suicide through the "white nights" suicide rituals. During these, members would prove their loyalty by drinking a cup of what they were told was poison (Krause 1978:192-193). These rituals occurred once a week in the months preceding the Ryan visit. Having thus brought his followers to the point where "the ego was not its own property," we must turn to Freud to complete our explanation of why his followers willingly chose death.

In Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921), Freud explains that under the spell of the leader, group members renounce the internalized parental image (their own conscience) and relegate that role to the leader, who then becomes the new ego ideal, or conscience (pp. 76-84). Jones actively encouraged this process by urging his followers to call him "Dad", and cut off communication with their own parents if those parents were unsympathetic to the Temple (Kerns 1979:239-260). With Jones as their ego ideal, it was possible for Temple members to pass over their own parentally-learned objections to suicide, kill themselves, and urge their children on to the poison.

Finally, the question of meaning must be considered. As a tightly-knit group which had come to depend on Jones for survival, many Temple members undoubtedly sensed that, following his death, their lives would lack direction. If the walls of their new world were to crumble, they would be left with no shield against meaninglessness and would have to face the realization that all they had sacrificed was for naught.<sup>13</sup>

One of the major lessons of People's Temple is that total devotion to a leader can have disastrous consequences. Wallace notes that:

The emotional appeal of the new doctrine . . . is in considerable part based on its immediate satisfaction of a need to find a supremely powerful and potentially benevolent leader. For both the prophet and his followers, this wish is gratified in fantasies (subjectively real, of course); but the follower's fantasy is directed toward the person of the prophet, to whom are attributed charismatic properties of leadership (1956:274).

Jones actively encouraged the fantasies of his followers. By replacing the Christian God with himself, his flock's need for a supremely powerful and potentially benevolent leader could be fulfilled only by Jones. With the security and omnipotence of the transcendent God removed, Jones served as the new anchoring point and took on the attributes formerly perceived to be held by God. During one of the "white night" suicide rituals, Jones repeated over and over that he was "the alpha and the omega" (Cahill 1979:56). He became the ultimate giver of life, death and salvation. No longer a mere preacher or political leader, in the subjective fantasies of much of his congregation, he was God.

Wallace warns that the fantasies and emotions associated with belief in God "could lead to even more unfortunate practical consequences . . . for human welfare when directed toward people improperly perceived (1956:277-278). History has made it clear that too many people in People's Temple held an improper perception.

### Summation

In summary, we should note the following points. The People's Temple was a revitalization movement which provided a new set of constructions and values for people alienated from mainstream American culture. In this sense it is similar to such movements as the Rastafari, which reject the mainstream of Jamaican culture.

Although it had some of the trappings of a political movement, it was cultic. Its leader, Jim Jones, set himself up as a god to make up for the sense of inferiority and the self-hatred he felt over his confused sexuality. A vast majority of Temple members set him up as their ego ideal. This was due to the manipulations and coercions of Jones, who combined traditional cultic practices such as faith healing and use of psychic powers with isolation, suicide rituals, the fostering of paranoia, the breakdown of ego, and the use of brute force to bind Temple members to him. These were the dynamics by which the Temple operated; it was a cult, not a political organization.

With the vast majority of Temple members bound to him, Jones was able to convince his followers to kill themselves. Jones chose suicide after it became clear that he would be disgraced, and this occurred against a background of intensive self-hatred, a declining sense of purpose, and a diminishing ability to cope with his life.

Like other movements which have promised a meaningful life to the disenfranchised members of a society, the People's Temple reflects ultimately on man's struggle for meaning in a shapeless world. This need for purpose and a satisfying understanding of the world has led the human race to fine accomplishments which reveal the best in its soul. It has also led to phenomena such as People's Temple, dark places where delusion and fantasy create a harsh, cold, and painful world. That human beings will delude themselves into such horrors is a sign that the quest for meaning, whether through fantasy or intelligent struggle, is of basic importance in our lives. Here it is appropriate to quote Nietzsche, who noted in Thus Spake Zarathustra that "Not only the rationality of milleniums--also their madness breaks out in us. Dangerous it is to be an heir."

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that shed more light on the Temple's mysteries. Finally, I owe a great deal to Marilyn Warden, whose willingness to type this manuscript prevented what might have been the last Temple-related suicide.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Ralph Linton, 1943, *Nativistic Movements*, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 45; F. E. Williams, 1923, *The Vailala Madness*, Bobbs-Merrill reprint A-241; James Mooney, 1965, *the Ghost Dance Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Yonina Talmon, *Millenarism*, data unavailable.

<sup>2</sup>One former Temple member believes that Jones "got the idea to play God" from Father Divine. After having been exposed to Divine, Jones would "take the Bible and throw it on the floor and say, 'Too many people are looking at this instead of looking at me'" (Trounstine 1978:5).

<sup>3</sup>The record shows that Jones also had sadistic tendencies, but whether these were part of his sex life has not been conclusively established. See, especially, Kilduff and Javers (1978:53-57, 63-65) and *Children Suffered Abuse Before Jonestown Suicide*, *San Jose Mercury*, June 10, 1979, p. 10A. In the latter, one woman is quoted as saying that Jones once told her he was "sexually excited by crying children and that one young boy in particular aroused him when in pain."

<sup>4</sup>Although Jones' hatred for those things was probably quite sincere on the conscious level, he was not above exploitation and racism himself (most of the Temple hierarchy was white). Once again we find a case of tremendous cognitive dissonance. Ironically, Jones' obsession with having a place in history and his resulting desire to "make it to the big time" are almost the antithesis of the communal security he bragged about.

<sup>5</sup>Speculatively, it is also possible that pastoring was a way in which Jones could put his sex life above reproach.

<sup>6</sup>In retrospect, it is amazing that the reporters who heard this did not understand and act on what Jones had said. Temple defectors traveling with them had previously informed them of the possibility of mass suicide.

<sup>7</sup>It is possible that Jones had decided to lead his followers to suicide during the night between the two-day visit. Compare his statement, "I'm not worried about my image. If we could just stop it. But if we don't I don't know what's going to happen to 1,200 lives here" made on the first day to "I'm not worried about my image anymore. I want to have never been born" made on the second.

<sup>8</sup>It is possible that Jones had moral objections to suicide and that dubbing it a "revolutionary act" enabled him to bridge that cognitive gap and kill himself.

<sup>9</sup>See Temple defector Deborah Blakey's statement in Krause, p. 192-- "He was irate at the light in which he had been portrayed in the media. He felt that as a consequence of having been ridiculed and maligned, he would be denied a place in history. His obsession with his place in history was maniacal. . . ." A rational man might realize that leading nearly a thousand people to their deaths would give him a black mark in history, but an irrational man might not.

<sup>10</sup>For further information on Jones' attitude toward his followers, see Transcripts of Jones Talks, San Jose Mercury, Saturday, November 17, 1979.

<sup>11</sup>See Appendix B for transcript of Jonestown tape during the mass suicides and Time magazine, December 4, 1978, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>For more "Letters to Dad," see Letters to Dad Reveal Fears of Cult Members in the San Jose Mercury, November 27, 1978, p. 20A; some were addressed "Dear God."

<sup>13</sup>Former Jones followers have dealt with the collapse of the Temple in three basic ways. First, those who had never given their lives to Jones entirely are proceeding to cope with post-Temple life. A second group have refused to believe Jones was mad, one woman saying it was "the greatest regret of her life" that she "was not there at the end. I would have been first in line. Jim Jones was a great man." Another Jones follower shot himself after sending a letter to San Francisco columnist Herb Caen in which he defended the Temple. The third group are finding post-Temple life difficult. Included is Jones' 19-year-old son who told the press, "I almost hate the man. He has destroyed almost everything I have lived for."



## APPENDIX A

## METHODS AND RITUALS OF MANIPULATION

Jones' power depended upon the degree to which his followers were bound to him for both mental and physical survival. He encouraged the "loyalty" of his followers through several means discussed below. These practices are discussed in general in most of the references listed previously, and were given particular emphasis in Krause and Downie 1978:2; Krause 1978:187-194; Cahill 1979:48-57; and Greenberg 1979:378-382. Below is a summary of the practices used.

Fears of Persecution and Isolation

Encouragement of paranoia, of fear of persecution, was one of his most important tactics. Jones painted a negative image of capitalist America, an America scheming to destroy himself and his flock, that was all too believable to his followers. Said one Temple defector: "He induced the fear in others that, through their contact with him, they had become targets of the conspiracy. He convinced black Temple members that if they did not follow him to Guyana they would be put in concentration camps and killed. . . . Whites . . . would be tracked down [by the CIA], tortured, imprisoned, and subsequently killed if they did not flee to Guyana." Though promise of utopia may have been part of the reason to go to Jonestown, another part was insecurity and the fear of persecution and brutal death.

Jonestown itself, located in a spot isolated by dangerous jungle, was another binding force. Its isolation prevented easy access from the outside and easy escape from the inside. No television, radio, or media of any kind could interfere with the word of Jones. The absence of any conflicting stimuli and the danger of the jungle made his paranoid visions even more believable.

Jones argued that CIA mercenaries hid in the trees around the settlement and claimed that defectors were CIA provocateurs. The CIA was after People's Temple because, according to Jones, "We were too effective at organizing people of all races to work together. In the eventuality of economic crisis, it was thought we would have too much organizing potential among the economically deprived of all races." Enemies abroad made it imperative to stay at Jonestown. Enemies in the jungle made it imperative to stay in the compound. Jones' fears show that he attached more importance to the Temple than it actually had. Perhaps it seemed more important in an atmosphere of isolation than on Geary Street.

Aside from fostering paranoia and using isolation to his advantage, Jones bound his followers to him in other ways, using tactics both physical and psychological. They included:

### Physical Exhaustion

Most Temple members were required to work in the hot, humid fields from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. six days a week and on Sundays from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Food rations were poor: "rice for breakfast, rice water soup for lunch, and rice and beans for dinner. On Sunday we each received an egg and a cookie." "The most loyal were in the worst physical condition. Dark circles under one's eyes or extreme loss of weight were considered signs of loyalty."

### Mental Exhaustion

In addition to poor physical health, other factors caused mental exhaustion. Jones broadcast his thoughts "an average of six hours per day" via the Jonestown loudspeaker. "When the reverend was particularly agitated" he talked longer, often while residents worked in the fields or tried to sleep at night. Marathon meetings occurred seldom less than three and often more than five nights per week. The congregation got only three or four hours of sleep on these nights. Family members were instructed to spy on other family members. There was little free time for recreation or social visiting, nor could you be sure that the person you talked to was not an informer. "Newspeak" was employed: the guard tower in the middle of the settlement was called "the playground"; armed guards were the "public service unit"; the place where offenders were heavily sedated was the "extra care unit."

### Physical Force

Armed guards patrolled the compound. Only the trusted were allowed out on special missions. Those who displeased Jones were forced to work on chain gangs or were shut up in a three foot high "punishment box" for up to a week. Offenders were beaten at the marathon meetings.

### Breakdown of Families

Children were made to spy on their parents. "It was so effective in breaking up marriages," said one Jonestown survivor. In the same way that Jones made himself the only legitimate object of spiritual desire, so he did with sexual desire. Jones personally broke up marriages by having sex with both husbands and wives. He coerced people into writing confessions of child beating and homosexual behavior, thus inculcating guilt while resorting to blackmail should anyone decide to leave the Temple. He urged people to call him "Dad," a familial term that aided in displacing paternal authority within the family. Marceline Jones was called "Mom." The parent-child connotation is apparent.

### Inculcation of Guilt

On occasion, Jones would fake a heart attack at Jonestown when a member disobeyed or disagreed with him. The wrath of the congregation would then turn on that member. Jones' constant reminder that he suffered from various diseases served to reinforce the congregation's loyalty. His illnesses generally coincided with acts of disloyalty, and thus acts of disloyalty (as defined by Jones) became threats to the very survival of the new maze and those who shared it.

### Confession

Claiming it was the socialist practice of criticism/self-criticism, Jones had his followers confess their disloyalty in "Letters to Dad" and at night-long meetings. Offenders were supposed to be confronted by family members first, then others. They often received beatings after which they were supposed to apologize to the congregation for their wrongs.

In these ways, and undoubtedly others, Jones added the concept of stark, brutal fear to the hopeful idealism of his followers' mazes. He controlled their food, physical safety, sex lives, and family relationships. He destroyed their physical and mental resistance to the bleak reality of Jonestown.

We can see from this information that several of the practices took on a ritualized or quasi-ritualized form. Though not ritualistic in a worshipful sense, these and undoubtedly other rituals served to maintain the power dynamics of the group. Their cumulative effect was to demonstrate and confirm Jones' power while emphasizing the subordinate role of the individual. Additionally, they primed Jones' followers for suicide.

For those totally receptive to Jones, these rituals confirmed that the enemy was drawing near and that disloyalty threatened the group, thus encouraging them to demonstrate their loyalty to Jones. In the words of New York Medical College Assistant Professor of Psychiatry Richard Barrett Ulman, ". . . whatever agony was in those people's lives before they joined the People's Temple was not merely mirrored in Jonestown but rather shaped by Jones so as to give their pain and anguish the seeming virtue of self-sacrifice and ennoblement" (Greenberg 1979:382).

For those secretly desiring to leave Jonestown, the practices served to wear down resistance to Jones and life in the jungle settlement. In the words of Jonestown veteran Deborah Blakey, "Life at Jonestown was so miserable and the pain of exhaustion so great that this event [practice suicide] was not traumatic for me. I became indifferent to whether I lived or died" (Krause 1978:193).

## APPENDIX B

## TRANSCRIPT OF FINAL JONESTOWN MEETING

## DIRECTLY PRIOR TO THE MASS SUICIDES

JONES: What's going to happen here in a matter of a few minutes is that one of a few on that plane is gonna . . . gonna shoot the pilot. I know that. I didn't plan it but I know it's gonna happen. They're gonna shoot that pilot and down comes the plane into the jungle. And we had better not have any of our children left when it's over cause they'll parachute in here on us.

. . . So, my opinion is that we'd be kind to children and be kind to seniors and take the potion, like they used to take in ancient Greece and step over quietly, because we are not committing suicide: It's a revolutionary act.

WOMAN [identified as Christine Miller]: I feel like that as long as there's life, there's hope. There's hope. That's my feeling.

JONES: Well someday everybody dies. Someplace that hope runs out 'cause everybody dies.

CROWD NOISE: That's right, that's right!

CHRISTINE MILLER: I said I'm afraid to die.

JONES: I don't think you are. I don't think you are.

CHRISTINE MILLER: But, uh, I look at all the babies and I think they deserve to live.

JONES: I agree.

CHRISTINE MILLER: Yunno.

JONES: But also they deserve much more. They deserve peace.

[Noises of approval can be heard from crowd]

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: It's over, sister, it's over. We've made that day. We made a beautiful day. And let's make it a beautiful day.

[Again, crowd shouts approval]

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN (sobbing): We're all ready to go. If you tell us we have to give our lives now, we're ready.

[Crowd shouts approval]

ANOTHER UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: So we might as well end it now, because I don't. . . .

JONES (interrupting): Keeping talking, the congressman has been murdered . . . the congressman's dead. Please get us some medication. It's simple. It's simple, there's no convulsions with it, it's just simple. Just please get it before it's too late. The G.D.F. [Guyanese army] will be here. I tell you, get moving, get moving, get moving. . . . How many are dead? Aw, God all-mighty, God all-mighty. . . . It's too late, the congressman's dead. The congressman's aide's dead. Many of our traitors are dead. They're all layin' out there dead.

NURSE: You have to move, and the people that are standing there in the aisle, go stay in the radio room yard. So everybody get behind the table and back this way, OK? There's nothing to worry about. So everybody keep calm, and try to keep your children calm. And the older children are to help lead the little children and reassure them. They aren't crying from pain. It's just a little bitter tasting but that's . . . they're not crying out of any pain.

ANOTHER UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: I just wanta say something to everyone that I see that is standing around and, uh, crying. This is nothing to cry about. This is something we could all rejoice about. We could be happy about this.

JONES: Please, for God's sake, let's get on with it. We've lived. . . . Let's just be done with it. Let's be done with the agony of it.

[Noise, confusion, and applause]

. . . Let's get calm, let's get calm.

[Screams in background]

I don't know who fired the shot, I don't know who killed the congressman. But as far as I'm concerned I killed him. You understand what I'm saying? I killed him. He had no business coming. I told him not to come.

. . . Die with respect. Die with a degree of dignity. Lay down your life with dignity. Don't lay down with tears and agony. Stop this hysterics. This is not the way for people who are socialistic communists to die. No way for us to die. We must die with some dignity.

. . . Children, it's just something to put you to rest. O, God!

[More crying in background]

. . . I tell you, I don't care how many screams you hear, I don't care how many anguished cries, death is a million times preferable to ten more days of this life.

. . . If you'll quit telling them they're dying. If you adults will stop this nonsense. I call on you to quit exciting your children when all they're doing is going to a quiet rest.

. . . All they're doing is taking a drink they take to go to sleep. That's what death is, sleep.

. . . Take our life from us. We laid it down. We got tired. We didn't commit suicide. We committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhuman world.

[No more talking on tape, just noise of music from speakers at Jonestown, going on for another several minutes]

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