

Anna Maria College
The Psychology Behind Jonestown:
When Extreme Obedience and Conformity Collide

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Author's Note:

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Abstract

Notoriously throughout our history, cults of extremist religious views have made the headlines for a number of different crimes. Simply looking at instances like the Branch Davidians in Waco, or the members of the People's Temple of Christ from Jonestown, it's easy to see there is no lack of evidence as to the disastrous effects of what happens when these cults reach an extreme. When one person commits an atrocious crime, we can blame that person for their actions, but who do we blame when there's 5 or even 900 people that commit a crime because they are so seemingly brainwashed by an individual that they'll blindly follow and do whatever that individual says? Studying cases, like that of Jonestown and the People's Temple of Christ, where extreme conformity and obedience have led to disastrous and catastrophic results is important because in the words of George Santayana "those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it." By studying and analyzing Jonestown and the mass suicide that occurred there, people can learn how Jim Jones was able to gain complete control of the minds of his over 900 followers and why exactly people began following him in the first. Furthermore, I hypothesize that while examining Jonestown, I'll be able to find evidence that supports that members of the People's Temple joined the extremist religious group because of different societal factors and other individual factors that made the members vulnerable and that they became totally obedient of Jim Jones by his use of different elements of behavioral psychology like conditioning and social isolation.

Keywords: Jonestown, Mass Suicide, Massacre, Cult, Behavioral Psychology, Jim Jones, People's Temple of Christ

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Jonestown Massacre of Western Guyana is historically considered one of the worse mass suicides in history. At the order of religious cult leader, Jim Jones, more than 900 people committed suicide in the Jonestown community that was home of the religious group, the People's Temple of Christ. Looking back at different cases throughout the world, people might have a hard time comprehending how one person could have such an influence over the choices and decisions others make, but it's something that is seen time and time again throughout history. Consider how Hitler was able to have total obedience of pretty much all of Germany, or how Koresh had his Branch Davidians followers engaged in a 51-day standoff with Federal Law Enforcement officials in Waco.

Just how historically these men were able to have total obedience and control over the thoughts, actions, and decisions of others, Jim Jones was able to have complete obedience and control of his fellow subjects. This total control Jim Jones was able to have over his people cost over 900 people their lives and left the world in total shock and confusion as to how one person could amass such power and control over others. It left people asking themselves what exactly drew these individuals to follow this man so blindly, even until death. Jim Jones was able to use the political atmosphere and segregation of the time, the vulnerability of the people, and his charisma to manipulate and control the members of his church and in doing so, seemingly brainwash them.

Background

Jonestown was established in 1977 in western Guyana by American native Jim Jones, the leader of the religious cult the People's Temple of Christ. It was home to over 1,000 members of the religious sect. Jonestown is notoriously known for the November 1978 massacre, which

resulted after an investigation of alleged abuse was headed by California State Representative Leo Ryan after family members of those in Jonestown raised concerns about their loved ones in Guyana (Glass, M). The massacre resulted in the mass suicide of more than 900 of Jones' followers and the murder of State Representative Ryan and other members of his party and those who were unwilling to partake in the suicide. The People's Temple of Christ and Jim Jones didn't start out as a cult doing bad things, in fact, Jim Jones used his Pentecostal influence for good at one point, using it as a platform to talk about segregation and inequality (Glass, M). Because Jim Jones was such a proponent of desegregation, in 1954 he was forced to resign as associate pastor in a segregated all white church and as a result formed his own church in 1955 in Indianapolis which became known as the People's Temple Full Gospel Church. In 1965 Jones and some of his church members relocated their congregation from Indianapolis to Ukiah, California. The move was in order to avoid nuclear war, which Jim Jones believed was a growing risk. This thought of nuclear war was just the beginnings of paranoia as they began to inflict Jim. Jones believed "Apostolic Socialism" was the coming Kingdom of God and he believed that this kingdom would be a Utopia in which his followers would find racial and economic equality. As Jones' reputation and notoriety grew, so did the church's membership, with its congregation growing in numbers of over 4,000. Jones' gospel messages attracted people of all races and backgrounds, but his congregation was comprised of mostly poor, Urban African Americans, with them making up more than 75% of the church's population. (Glass, M).

While Jones' congregation grew in numbers and success, Jones grew increasingly paranoid and began abusing drugs and becoming extremely controlling of his followers, demanding total control and absolute obedience. His increasingly erratic behavior caused a number of his

followers to begin severing ties with Jones and the People's Temple, while the other remaining members began submitting fully to Jones. By the mid-1970's allegations of abuse began surfacing about the People's Temple and Jones and because of these allegations along with accusations by the U.S. Government about tax evasion, Jim Jones and his followers decided to move to the jungles of Guyana. Once in Guyana Jones made his followers work in agriculture fields 6 days a week in the hot Guyana heat and he became even more controlling, especially in regards to finances. He controlled all the finances of the community and would even take individuals' private wealth, including welfare checks they would receive (Leonard, T.M.). Jones also began preaching to his followers about something he called "translation" in which him and his followers would all die together and as a result move to another planet and live their afterlife together in bliss. To test his follower's obedience and condition them to commit suicide, he would frequently have mass "suicide drills" where everyone was expected to line up and drink a fruit flavored punch that was supposedly laced with poison. Once everyone dutifully obliged and drank the "poison" Jones would then inform them that it was just a test of their faith and there was no poison. This of course, was all in preparation for the real mass suicide that would soon ensue (Leonard, T.M.).

While all this was going on in Guyana, back in the United States concerned family members of followers of Jones began coming together rallying for an investigation of what was going on in Guyana, alleging that their family members were being held against their will and that human rights violations were occurring at the People's Temple in Guyana. As a result of these allegations, congress authorized Representative Leo Ryan of California to lead an investigation of Jonestown and discover if there were any human rights violations occurring and if any American Citizens were in fact, being abused and held against their will.

Representative Ryan, his party, and a number of concerned family members arrived in Jonestown November 17, 1978. While Ryan and the family members were led around the grounds and shown all Jonestown had to offer, Ryan was secretly approached by several members who said they wanted to leave Jonestown, by the conclusion of Ryan's investigation over 15 members had asked to be taken away. On November 18th, 1978 as Representative Ryan and everyone who wanted to leave Jonestown boarded the planes that would take them away from Jonestown and to freedom, they were attacked by members of the People's Temple, who shot and killed five members of the party and forced the other surviving members to run for their lives and hide in the Jungle (Leonard, T.M.). Among the dead was Representative Leo Ryan. After ordering the attack, Jones ordered all the members of his community to gather in the central square where he convinced everyone that the Guyanese military was going to go and execute them all and him and his inner circle began passing out drinks. Unlike the many suicide drills before, this time, the drinks were laced with a mixture of cyanide and valium. As a result, that night more than 909 members died- some by suicide and those who resisted suicide were either shot, strangled, or injected with cyanide. This tragic night resulted in the largest mass suicide in history and became known as the Jonestown Massacre.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to serve as an analysis of Jonestown and to gain an understanding of what went on in the minds of the members of the People's Temple and Jim Jones himself. It will also serve to attempt and identify the different social and behavioral psychological theories Jones used to "brainwash" his followers into total obedience and what factors made members vulnerable to cult recruitment. It's important to analyze the events leading up to the Jonestown massacre and what happened on the day of November 18, 1978 in

order to gain an understanding of what drove people to not only follow, but obey, until death, one man. By analyzing what made certain individuals vulnerable to the grip of an extremist religious cult, it will help identify what people are at risk and how to best help them and interfere before a cult is able to get their clutches on them and manipulate them into total obedience. Furthermore, it will help to identify what events happened prior to the Jonestown Massacre and serve as warning signs for other future potential dangerous threats by other cults.

Hypothesis and Questions to Consider

There are a number of different religious groups and organizations all over the world and for the most part none of them are ever involved in any criminal activity, so what exactly sets apart these normal religious groups to extremist religious groups, like the People's Temple, that take a deadly turn? Furthermore, what pushes individuals to join religious cults and find refuge in a controlling and oppressive regime? Trying to understand exactly how an individual is able to gain total obedience over such a mass number of individuals is crucial, not only so history doesn't repeat itself, but also to help establish an understanding and in doing so, prevent future potential casualties resulting from total obedience. It will also serve to teach people what different warning signs to look out for in a church, or other mass movement, or organization. Not only is it important to know how cult leaders, like Jones, are able to gain control over their followers, or why individuals join cults, but also different societal factors that push individuals to seek out an extremist religious cult. I hypothesize that Jones was able to use key elements of behavioral and social psychology such as obedience, conditioning and conformity in order to gain complete control and blind obedience of his followers. Had Jones not had the charisma and ability to use these psychological elements to his advantage, he would have never been able to amass such obedience and such a large following. Furthermore, I hypothesize Jones

was able to attract certain individuals that had different emotional conditions or vulnerabilities that made them vulnerable to recruitment. Some of these conditions included: loneliness, lack of acceptance, and segregation that was prevalent in the United States at the peak of the People's Temple.

Relevance to the Field of Psychology and Law

It's important for a number of different professionals to know exactly how to deal with the aftermath of cults in addition to knowing how to prevent a cult leader from having a dangerous hold over his or her followers. As a psychology and law and society major, there are two very distinct and different ways in which Jonestown is relevant to my field of study. For counseling psychologists and law enforcement officials who are tasked with the difficult duty of working with individuals who have seemingly been brainwashed by cult leaders, it's important to know the deep rooted psychological hold cult leaders have on their followers and the different ways these leaders were able to gain control of their followers. Knowing this information can help professionals know the best way which they can work with the individuals escaping cults to begin the long road to recovery and freedom from the cult leaders' clutches. Law enforcement officials are many times the first on the scene responding to calls and if they were ever the first to respond to a scene where a cult had been operating, it's important for them to know how to approach the members and speak to them. For many cult members, it could be their first interaction with an "outsider" and the impression they leave is important to show these people that there is a world outside of their cult with people who will treat them with kindness. It's also important for law enforcement officials to know that while cult members may have committed a crime, it is not because that individual is inherently a bad person, but because of the deep rooted psychological hold many cult leaders have over their subjects.

Through a psychological perspective it's important to know the ins and outs of cults, cult behavior, and control, so that psychologists can work with former members of cults to unlearn, in a way, everything that they were taught within the cult. The members who were able to escape Jonestown probably needed extensive psychological treatment to deal with the trauma of everything that went on in Jonestown and all they were forced to endure as members of the People's Temple. Studying the events of Jonestown can help psychologists learn how to best help former members deal with their trauma and work together to help them assimilate back into a normal society.

Definitions

In order to best understand Jonestown, it's helpful to become acquainted with the definitions of some terminology used throughout this thesis. All definitions were obtained from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (*The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*).

Cult- a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious

Cyanide- a compound of cyanogen with a more electropositive element or group

Suicide- the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally

Obedience- an act or instance of obeying

Conformity- action in accordance with some specified standard or authority

Conditioning- a simple form of learning involving the formation, strengthening, or weakening of an association between a stimulus and a response

Behavioral Psychology- a school of psychology that takes the objective evidence of behavior (as measured responses to stimuli) as the only concern of its research

Trauma- a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury

Ego- the psychological component of the personality that is represented by our conscious decision-making process. The id is the instinctual, biological component , and the superego is the social component of our personality and conscience .

Narcissistic- one of several types of personality disorders — is a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others.

Psychoanalytic- relating to or involving the theories of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis- a system of psychological theory and therapy which aims to treat mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind by techniques such as dream interpretation and free association.

Ethical Considerations

When doing this thesis project there weren't any moral or ethical considerations to take into account. Anna Maria College policy states that certain criteria allows for an exception of review from the Institutional Review Board. The college policy states that "research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available..." (IRB) are exempt from review and since this thesis was based on already existing data, documents, and records it did not need to be submitted for review. If this study involved tracking down the survivors of Jonestown and collecting original information and research for the thesis, then in that instance ethical considerations would have to be taken into account and the research proposal would have to be submitted for review to Anna Maria College's Institutional Review Board.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to best have an understanding of Jonestown and Jim Jones and to develop original analysis pertaining to the topic, it's first necessary to search and find out if there are related works and studies about Jonestown and Jim Jones. Finding relevant material on the topic allows me to analyze each publishing, compare the findings of each work as they pertain to Jonestown, Jim Jones and the members of the People's Temple and begin developing original analysis on the subject matter. The literature that I found and researched that pertained to Jonestown focused on many different areas of Jim Jones, Jonestown and the members. Furthermore, it analyzed Jonestown through a psychological and psychoanalytic perspective, and reviewed different subject matter such as the self, the collective group of a mass movement, Jones as a charismatic leader.

A phenomenon analyzed in Jonestown is one of group psychology triggering mass madness which is what engulfed the members of Jonestown and caused the events that occurred. According to a previous study by Ulman and Abse, an individual can have anxiety that is directly related to feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and insecurity and in order to allay those feelings they try to identify with a mass movement in which the leader is charismatic. The reason for doing this is that "the individual seeks to achieve a transcendence of the battered and bruised self through participation in a noble and uplifting cause" (Ulman & Abse). Because the individual feels so accepted within this movement and it helps him/her forget the negative feelings, the individual because inadvertently swept into a collective mentality. In other words, they stop becoming an individual and become a cog in the mass movement with no feelings of self. This becomes dangerous in cases such as Jonestown when "...individuals are swept up into collective endeavor[s] directed by a leader of both heroic and demonic bent, they become

caught up in a psychological field pulled by the countervailing forces of the dynamics of transcendence and those of madness” (Ulman & Abse). Jim Jones is a perfect example of a charismatic leader that was both heroic and demonic at the same time. By being a strong advocate for racial equality he was revered by many as a hero of his time fighting for justice and equality, but at the same time, his paranoia, abuse and control of his disciples contradicted his heroic self. From a psychoanalytic perspective, individuals of Jonestown were the subjects of collective regression of the ego and self by realizing and attaining “shared ideals and common aspirations....attainment and realization of such shared ideals and aspirations boost self-esteem and self-worth and thus help to repair earlier narcissistic damage to self-image...When groups regress to earlier archaic and developmentally arrested levels of experiencing and functioning, any attempt to share group aspirations in an effort to compensate for past narcissist injuries becomes a destructive and often violent enactment of narcissist rage. Such collective pathological regressions plunge leader and led alike into mass madness.” (Ulman & Abse). The individuals of Jonestown, 75% of which were African American, were looking to find acceptance and heal from the wounds that the segregated society that plagued the United States and was the political atmosphere at the time, had inflicted on them. In order to do this they joined Jonestown, but in doing so soon actually became the victims of an even more oppressive atmosphere, one that was infected with abuse, mass madness, and eventually death.

Another potential explanation to why individuals join cults is explained by Stark and Sims. According to Stark and Sims, the central question to ask when examining extremist religious groups is what does this faith promise, and to whom do such promises most appeal? The answer according to Stark and Sims is interpersonal relations. The key to recruitment is

centered around the role of social networks and shows that interpersonal bonds between a certain religious group's members and the individuals who are potential recruits is essential. As previously addressed, cults and extremist religious sects tend to recruit individuals who are deprived of something, i.e. relationships, acceptance, etc. Recruitment of individuals who feel they are missing something makes them the perfect obedient members of a cult because they are vulnerable and by "...lacking restraints, and seeking to belong, mass society residents were prone to respond impulsively to propaganda blitzes by social movements such as Nazism, communism, or extremist religious movements which offered a pseudosense of community (Stark & Sims). Finding vulnerable individuals as members is just one of the elements that cults utilize in molding totally obedient followers.

Another key elements utilized by cults is social isolation from "the outside world." This was seen in how Jim Jones completely removed his members from the outside world by totally eliminating their means of communication to members outside of the People's Temple. This isolation served to strengthen their bonds within the cult community because it was the only social relationships available to them. According to Glass, M., & Queen, E.L., "...the alienation [and isolation observed in cults] comes from the new practices and beliefs that individuals adopt, while others may be an intentional act by a group's leader to remove their followers from 'hostile' and 'suspicious' outsiders and 'evil' influences." This can be observed in how members of the People's Temple completely cut ties with their family members, or outsiders. The various different mind control techniques that Jones would use in addition to the isolation was key to gaining total obedience from his followers. "...The creation of a new social environment--provided Jones with a powerful influence over his followers, Zimbardo says. Quite arguably, Jones, through his natural understanding of social psychology, knew the

way to obtain a strong influence over his followers was to move them from their urban American environment to a remote South American jungle, generating uncertainty in their new surroundings, Cialdini says. And when people are uncertain, they look to others for cues on what to do, research has shown. Zimbardo notes that people are particularly vulnerable when they are in new surroundings, feel lonely or disconnected” (Dittman). The majority of Jonestown member’s in some way felt disconnected from the larger world, namely because of the fact that a large majority of them were African Americans living in a segregated society.

The suicide drills which Jim Jones would constantly use served as a type of psychological conditioning to his followers. “[Due to]...Jones’ constant discussions of torture, dying, and death, we can argue that many of those present on November 18 were effecting an action which had been ritualized, and perhaps even sacralized, in the community. Jonestown survivors contend that no one ever took the suicide drills seriously, and that they just went along with an empty ritual” (Moore, *Sacrament of Suicide*). By continually doing mass suicide drills, Jones was able to condition his followers into accepting their fate and blindly taking the “poison” with no resistance and no questions asked. As a result of this conditioning, when the time came for the real suicide, the majority of the members were so conditioned to it because of the drills that they didn’t hesitate to ingest the poison.

Another way that the members of Jonestown were conditioned was by their deep-seeded belief in their faith and blind obedience to Jones’s teachings. According to Stark & Sims, “faith constitutes conformity to the religious outlook.” Most religions’ faith does not condone or advocate for violent acts, but the People’s Temple was unlike most religious groups in that it was an extremist group, a cult. This cult was one that advocated total control and violence in order to have its members fully submit to the faith and the teachings of the “prophet” Jim

Jones. These violent acts and taboo beliefs included punishments for misdeeds that went against what Jones said and believed, oppressive control, and isolation from individuals who were not like minded. While there are some similarities between cults and religious groups, the striking differences are ever more prominent and observable. “Sociologists, anthropologists, and historians of religion often stressed commonalities between cults and more socially acceptable religious groups. By contrast, a number of psychologists viewed cult members as mentally unhealthy”(Glass, M., & Queen, E. L.). While there is much room for debate about the differences and similarities between extremist religious groups and “normal” or “healthy” religious groups, one thing is for sure, the disastrous effects that the People’s Temple had on a number of different lives is something that for many can still be felt up to this day.

Conditioning wasn’t the only psychological tool Jones used in order to amass such obedience from his followers. As previously discussed, Jim Jones used a combination of different situational and social techniques to manipulate his members. According to Dittman, Jones derived some of his psychological techniques of manipulation from social psychologists’ research. Zimbardo has famously hypothesized that Jones most likely learned his ability to persuade from the famous thinker George Orwell. Zimbardo has found “...through research and interviews with Jonestown survivors, Zimbardo has found parallels between the mind control techniques used by Jones at Jonestown--namely sophisticated types of compliance, conformity and obedience training--and those described in Orwell's fictional book ‘1984’” (Dittman). Jones would require his followers to spy on one another and report back to him findings and he also continuously played messages from loudspeakers so that his followers would always hear his voice, even when they slept and ate. As previously discussed Jones

would frequently conduct mass suicide drills, an idea he also seemed to have derived from Orwell's book. In George Orwell's book, 1984, the main character said that "the proper thing was to kill yourself before they get you..." This idea seems to parallel with what Jones said to his followers prior to the mass suicide when he told them that they had to kill themselves because the Guyanese military was going to go and execute them all. Another parallel between Orwell's book 1984, and Jones' manipulation was the fact that Jones would have his followers give him written statements about their fears and mistakes and if they disobeyed or displeased him, he would use the information they had given him to humiliate them or he would subject them to their worst fears during public meetings, this was also seen portrayed in 1984 when the main character of the book broke his resistance when he was subjected to his worse fear. (Dittman). There wasn't one clear cut way that Jones seemed to use in order to manipulate his followers into complete submission, but rather, a combination of techniques and methods he picked up on that allowed him to effortlessly brainwash so many.

Chapter 3- Methods

This thesis experiment involved developing original analysis from already existing data in order to either corroborate or refute my hypothesis. The original analysis was derived from information obtained from a number of different publications found online at Anna Maria College's library database. The publications ranged from books, to journals, and scholarly articles about Jonestown and the People's Temple. Once I had thoroughly researched the subject matter and carefully chosen which publications related to my thesis, I then began developing my original analysis and began reviewing my hypothesis and comparing the data to the already existing data from the other already published works.

Chapter 4- Original Analysis

The massacre that happened in Jonestown was catastrophic and impacted not just the family members and friends of the victims, but an entire nation. Jim Jones and the influence he possessed over the members of Jonestown was one that was truly masterful in psychological nature. It wasn't just Jones' ability to use different social psychological techniques to manipulate the masses that were contributing factors to what happened in the jungles of Guyana all those years ago, but it seems to be just one of a number of different factors that seamlessly lined up to form the perfect recipe for disaster.

The atmosphere of the United States at the time of Jonestown was a key component of the deep rooted hold Jones seemed to possess over his followers. While in the 1960's and 70's the United States had made major headway for African American rights, it was still very much a place where racial tensions were high. In fact, less than ten years before the Jonestown massacre, civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. I believe it was no coincidence that the vast majority of Jonestown members were African American. Someone who had everything going for them in the United States would not uproot their entire lives to follow a religious leader to a jungle in South America, nonetheless follow and obey an individual who was controlling, oppressive, and abusive. People who had a generally good and comfortable life in the United States and had healthy social ties and emotional connections are people who are not easily manipulated and controlled. Those who are easy to manipulate and control are those who are vulnerable, those who feel alone, those who have been persecuted by others and are looking for belonging, safety and sanctuary. The African American community fit these criteria and as such, were extremely vulnerable to the promising call of a cult like the People's Temple.

By combining the psychological and social influences Jones used against the members of his temple and the societal atmosphere of the United States at the time the Jonestown massacre took place, it's easy to see just how Jones was able to gain complete submission and control over such a large number of people. Zimbardo says. "Jim Jones is probably the most charismatic cult leader in modern times in terms of his personal appeal, oratory, his sexual appeal, his just sheer dynamism and his total participation in the control of every member of his group" (Dittman). Just as I had hypothesized, Jones was in fact able to use key elements of behavioral and social psychology, elements such as obedience, conditioning and conformity in order to gain complete control and blind obedience of his followers. Furthermore, Jones had heavily drawn upon the mind control techniques authored by George Orwell in his book, 1984, to learn how to effortlessly gain control, fear and respect of his disciples. Jim Jones was also smart enough to know who to target in order to mold obedient followers. He was able to attract certain individuals that had a number of different vulnerabilities that made them susceptible to recruitment and all the false promises the People's Temple had to offer them. In the end, the only thing Jonestown and the People's Temple offered its members was an untimely demise that left the world in disbelief.

Chapter 5- Limitations and Recommendations

One of the major limitations of this study was that it was derived from other works and was not an original research project. The limitation of this, is that the data collected is then in a way, biased, depending on what the authors wrote in the works this thesis' data was collected from. Even if this thesis was collected using original data obtained from interviews from survivors of Jonestown, we still wouldn't really get the total picture of what went down and why people committed suicide at the command of Jones because we wouldn't be able to hear from the people who willingly committed suicide and why. We can hypothesize as to why those that killed themselves did, but we'll never really know. We will, however, be able to know what drew members to Jonestown by interviewing survivors of Jonestown, because there were survivors.

My recommendations for future studies would be to conduct original research by tracking down surviving members of Jonestown. After these members are tracked down you can ask questions about what drew these individuals to the People's Temple, what ultimately made them make the decision to move to Guyana to Jonestown, what made them stay even when they realized Jonestown was far from the idyllic place they were promised and what made them not kill themselves when so many did? These questions are extremely important and offer an insight into the minds of those that Jonestown drew, an insight that we cannot gain by simply studying what we know of Jonestown through other works.

Another important recommendation I have would be to analyze and study deeply what was going on in the United States in the surrounding areas of the church's' location. As previously stated throughout this essay, there weren't only psychological elements that contributed to member's induction and participation of Jonestown, but there were also situational elements

that contributed to this. Examining what was going on in society as a whole before and during the rise of the People's Temple is crucial in understanding the huge membership that the cult had.

Conclusion

Jonestown is quite arguably one of the most devastating examples of what happens when a cult has such a strong influence over individuals. People are all susceptible to the influences of others, but there are certain individuals that are more vulnerable to the predatory call and false promises of dangerous individuals like Jim Jones. Behavioral and social psychologists as well as prominent thinkers, like George Orwell, have to be mindful of their publishing's because men like Jim Jones can use their works to discover how to manipulate and control others for evil. While Jonestown and the events that unfolded there are very tragic, they serve as an important lesson as to the dangers of social, behavioral and situational psychology when used by dangerous men for manipulative means.

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