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# **Jim Jones: A popular figure amongst many**

A senior thesis submitted to  
The Department of Global Studies & Culture  
School of Management

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for a Bachelor of Arts degree in History

by

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### **Abstract Page**

Don't drink the Kool-Aid! Ever heard this term? Where it's a term that is based off the worst mass suicide ever to happen in the history of the world. Jim Jones a popular preacher in the 1950s to 1970s who taught about social justice. He was breaking ground in race relations, when it was still shady during that time period and he also introduced the idea of a "Utopian Society".

Struggling with economic, physical and emotional circumstances in his early life, made him realize what his mission was for later in life. It was through these circumstances that led him to form the Peoples Temple and gain such popularity amongst his congregation, and political figures.

In summary, this paper focuses on my theme which is "What made Jim Jones such a popular figure in society". It explores his background, his teachings, the links of several different counter-culture movements that were happening throughout that time period to his movement, the definition of a cult and examples, and lastly a brief summary of the fateful day, November 1978.

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## The Jim Jones Story: A Popular Figure amongst Many



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<sup>1</sup> [www.bing.com/images/search](http://www.bing.com/images/search), Accessed November 14 2019

It's hard to understand why a congregation of 912 people took their lives on November 18, 1978, following the persuasion of their charismatic leader, Jim Jones. It is also hard to imagine living in a closed up community, where there was no contact with the outside world and no contact with close friends and family. However in the minds and testimonies of survivors who lived through this whole ordeal, only they know why it happened and why their fellow constituents took their lives.

Some people thought that Jones brainwashed people and that they were lost souls. His popularity resonated from the fact that he was genuinely popular in his work for social justice. This really resonated with many of the social movements of the time.

In order to answer the thesis, we must first understand who Jim Jones is and his background. Jim Jones background tells us that he learned through experiences that happened throughout his childhood and his reasoning later in life was that he didn't want people of racial class to have to experience it in their lifetime.

Being brought up poor, people of his day thought he was weird and antisocial. Part of that was brought on by having to hear his father's racist remarks. Experiencing depression, facing oppression, witnessing discrimination, and dealing with inequality were the main factors that led him to accepting people from all different backgrounds.

There were many leaders during the years that made an impact on the world, both in a positive and in a negative way<sup>2</sup>. Many helped shape the world in many ways, such as helping the economy, introducing new ideas, and saving the world. One of those leaders who built up his movement, only to see it end in a disappointing manner, was Jim Jones. He became popular because he resonated with the social movements that were happening during this time period.

During his ministry, he touched up on many issues that were happening in his time period and some of those movements included Civil Rights, the LGBTQ Movement and the Feminist Movement. The Civil Rights resonated with the People's Temple because of the integration of both black and whites in the church. The LGBTQ Movement resonated because Jim Jones believed that he was

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<sup>2</sup> [www.biographyonline.net](http://www.biographyonline.net), Accessed November 14, 2019

heterosexual while members in his congregation were homosexuals. It's been said that he slept with both men and women throughout his ministry. Finally the Feminist Movement links to his beliefs that women were to have as equal rights in leadership as men were to have.

During this 1960's time period, there were many influential figures who wanted to be a part of change. Many were political, religious and common type people. One of those people was Jim Jones, founder of "Peoples Temple Movement". Many of the values he taught were issues that were happening throughout the 1960'.<sup>3</sup> Some of those Movements included Civil Rights, the Feminist Movement and the LGBTQ Movement. His message of social justice and fighting for the rights of the underclass made him a popular preacher.

Jim Jones was born on May 13, 1931 in a rural area of Crete, Indiana to James Thurman Jones, who was, a World War I Veteran, and his mother, Lynette Putnam. Jim Jones was of Irish and Welsh descent although later he claimed partial Cherokee ancestry through his mother. When he was born, it was during economic difficulties around the time of the Great Depression. The struggles of the Great Depression is what led his family to move to Lynn, Indiana in 1934. While there, Jim Jones grew up in a shack without plumbing.

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<sup>3</sup> "1960s." History.com. A&E Television Networks, August 21, 2018. <https://www.history.com/topics/1960s>



Growing up in Indiana, he lived in a poor side of town where he had nothing. His dad, James Thurman Jones was a drunk as well as a mystic teller, and he gambled a lot. His reason for that was due to him being wounded in the war, and that nobody would hire him. His mother, Lynette Putnam Jones had to work two jobs to support the family. So as Jim Jones grew up, he lived a very lonely life. Many of his childhood friends described him as weird and antisocial because of his obsession with religion. As he grew older, he began to take notice of what was going on around him. Part of it had to do with experiences from his childhood.

One experience had to do with an argument he had with his dad pertaining to a young African American Boy he had invited over. His dad refused him because he was black and the result was that this made Jones very angry and he didn't not talk to his dad for many years. It made Jones realize that inequality was a very big issue. Another event that took place was when Jim Jones, was the minister of the Sommerset Southside Methodist Church. The leaders of the church refused to accept blacks in the church. This is what led him to opening up the first Peoples Temple. The purpose was to allow the accepting of all African Americans, the downtrodden, the forgotten people into his church.

The civil rights movement of the 1960's was an organized effort by African Americans to end racial discrimination as well as to gain equal rights under the law. In order to tie in the movement with Jim Jones teaching, we must first understand the background of the civil rights movement. There was a decades-long struggle with the enforcement of constitutional and legal rights for African Americans. Through many strategies, protests and rallies, many led by various groups, such as the NAACP, the objective was to accomplish goals such as ending legalized racial segregation, disenfranchisement in public businesses and busses, and discrimination in the United States<sup>4</sup>.

The techniques taught in the movement by Martin Luther King Jr was the use of nonviolent campaigns and marches. Along with the Civil Rights Movement, The Supreme Court's decision of "Brown v. Board of Education" in 1954, led to outlawed segregation in schools. Along with that, the refusal of an African American Woman, Rosa Parks giving up her seat to a white man led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott<sup>5</sup>. The Civil Rights Movement brought on groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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<sup>4</sup> [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/crm.htm](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/crm.htm)

<sup>5</sup> "The 1960 Civil Rights Act." History Learning Site, March 27, 2015. <https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/the-civil-rights-movement-in-america-1945-to-1968/the-1960-civil-rights-act/>.

(SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)<sup>6</sup>. The CORE was a committee that was created to focus on the success of various sit-ins in Southern college towns throughout the 1960's in which black students refused to leave restaurants in which they were denied service based on their race.<sup>7</sup> The SCLC was founded by a group of Baptist's Ministers who wanted to focus on social issues such as community, helping the poor, voting rights for African Americans and Civil Rights<sup>8</sup>. The SNCC was founded in April 1960 by young people who were dedicated to nonviolent, direct action tactics in fighting for what they believed in. In other words, Non Violence was the key and everything was done out of Love and peace<sup>9</sup>.

Despite the differences in strategy and tactics, the movement focused on eliminating the fears of Jim Crow segregation<sup>10</sup>. The movement led many African Americans to be met with hostility. Through the use of protests and political organizing, several achievements took place with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965<sup>11</sup>. Along with the Civil Rights Movement, another movement came into view. The Feminist Movement was well

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<sup>7</sup> [www.britanica.com/](http://www.britanica.com/) congress of racial equality

<sup>8</sup> [www.britanica.com/](http://www.britanica.com/) southern leadership conference

<sup>9</sup> History Channel, "student non- violent coordinating committee "Accessed November 14, 2019

<sup>10</sup> [www.americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/1-segregated/jim-crow.html](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/1-segregated/jim-crow.html), Accessed November 14, 2019

<sup>11</sup> [www.history.com/.amp/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement](http://www.history.com/.amp/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement), Accessed November 14, 2019

underway and in many ways, it was building momentum with the 19th amendment that was approved by  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the states in 1964. The argument was made that throughout both world wars, the women were very much involved while the men had to go out and fight. While the men were away, the women were left with all the work. So it was fitting to them that they should gain their rights<sup>12</sup>. Throughout the 1960's, more and more women were out in the workforce. Many left their homes and their children to take many dangerous jobs in the industry. The eventual passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed with the implications that voting rights would be for both men and women of color<sup>13</sup>.

One such author Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which was written in order to help millions of women understand their discontent regarding the lack of equal pay. In her article, she argued that women had no reason to do anything else, either then "finding a husband or bearing children". In her article, Betty Friedan encouraged her readers to seek new roles as well as new responsibilities in their everyday life. She also encouraged them to have their own personal as well as professional identities rather than what society defined them as in a male-dominated society<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/1960s-feminist-activities-3529000>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bustle.com/articles/180922-the-womens-equality-day-celebration-of-the-19th...>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/betty-friedan>

The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s drew inspiration from the civil rights movement. It was made up of members from the middle class, and led to several rebellions that affected large groups of middle-class youth. During that same time period, a sexual revolution of the 1960s emerged, with the development and marketing of the birth-control pill.

During the same era, Reform legislation in the United States Government also prompted change. During one such debate regarding the 1964 Civil Rights bill, many conservatives in the US hoped to defeat the measure by proposing an amendment to outlaw discrimination on the basis of gender.

The question in doubt is, how the woman's movement connects with the Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple Movement. The role of women in leadership was very slim in the workplace, and a person wouldn't expect a women to assist in running a business, church or even a church organization. Jim Jones believed, however, that women were a vital part in the decision making. Every person in the leadership circle were women who made a majority of the decisions for the community<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.aetv.com/specials/jonestown-the-women-behind-the-massacre/full-special->

Jim Jones believed in the early part of his ministry that women were a vital part of the community and just as equal as men. He often referred to his own upbringing, where his mom was the main provider in the family and where his dad did very little.

However as time went on, women became less important in several ways. In many documentaries, many survivors claim that more women lived in Jonestown than men did. There were many claims that black women made up 45% of the group and while white women made up 13%. In many cases, women were made to be unequal in the movement, although there were some women held some power in the leadership. In some ways he empowered them while in other ways he used them as sexual objects<sup>16</sup>. In order to maintain control, he forced many married couples to be separated and marriage was later abolished. This was a tactic he used in order to sleep with many women and men in the church. It was stated by many survivors that he was heterosexual and everyone else was homosexual. And this is what leads me to discuss another movement that was picking up speed during the 1950's and 1960's.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Guyana Tragedy: the Story of Jim Jones*, n.d.

The LGBTQ Community movement of the 1950s to 1960'. Many young people started becoming more aware of their bodies and they started discovering their identities. Although not as popular as today, there were a few successes in the late 1950's, and early 1960's. One of those events was "the Stone Wall Riots". The Stonewall riots of the 1960's were a symbol of resistance to social and political discrimination that was used to inspire solidarity and community amongst homosexual groups for future engagements. The Stonewall riots were said to have served as a method for activism in the political aspect<sup>17</sup>.

Throughout the early time period, the homosexual movement remained small<sup>18</sup>. However as the fight for activism arose and the argument "Gay is good" came into being, many people protested.

Some of those included decriminalization of homosexual acts, which allowed people to respect their way of life and culture, avoiding hateful gestures and going against their ways of lives and beliefs. Also included was equal treatment and equal rights under the law, which meant that they would get the same rights as everyone else. In an interview, he exclaimed the following, "Feeling as an outcast, I early developed a sensitivity for the problems of blacks, "As a child

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<sup>17</sup> [www.Britannica.com/](http://www.Britannica.com/) Stone Wall Riots

<sup>18</sup> <https://study.com/academy/lesson/lgbt-civil-rights-movements-in-the-1960s-1970s.html>

I was undoubtedly one of the poor in the community, never accepted, born as it were on the wrong side of the tracks”<sup>19</sup>.

There were a few achievements that included in it was the right to publish gay and lesbian magazines, educating people about their culture, the first employment discrimination case won, which allowed equal treatment in the workplace, constraints on police harassment, less harassment by law enforcement in public, dialogue opened in the scientific and religious communities, where the critics were most gathered at, media visibility, where the media was able to visualize the destination and the portrayal of the homosexual community in the world. Also included were organizational impulse, where organizations were urged to treat the homosexual community better. Lastly the realization was that gays and lesbians were mistreated, as well as labeled as a persecuted minority.

So one again, the question is raised, how does this movement compare to Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple? Jim Jones was thought to be heterosexual while everyone else in his congregation were considered homosexuals. And

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<sup>19</sup> *The Guyana Tragedy: the Story of Jim Jones*, n.d.



although this was controversial, in the People's Temple it became an acceptable form of life. And in doing so, he exploited people so much that in many cases, it got out of control. In doing so, he introduced the concept of Communism. In both cases the LGBTQ Movement and the communist movement were both apart of the counter culture of the 1960's. Communism pertains to the philosophy of social, political, and economic ideology. The ultimate goal for this movement was to establish a society that was based on the social economy. It was meant to be structured by the means of production. During the time period of the 1960's, Communism was growing very fast in the United States. Many people believed that it was going to be the focal point of human life. Imagine a life where money was not needed, state was not issue and everyone focused on fixing the economy. Well that was what communism was supposed to be like<sup>20</sup>.

Under a communist system, the means of production are owned collectively by the people engaged in labor. The socialist ideas from Karl Marx stated that the government takeover of property and factories as well as dividing the wealth more evenly among the population, were the key to a successful society.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://usnationalistnews.wordpress.com/2013/10/02/did-you-know-jim-jones-was-an...>

In comparison to his views, that was one of the key focuses on the Peoples Temple Movement. Having a good economy for its members, was what Jim Jones wanted for his people. So before he launched his ministry, he had to learn about what communism was. He had to learn it, so he could teach it. He had to come up with ways to make it easier, in order to relate it to his congregation.

In order to prepare, Jim Jones started attending rallies that were held by the communist party. As he became a vocal member of the rallies, he started getting harassed from the FBI. It was at this time, that Jim Jones began infiltrating the religious institutions and he used this experience to preach the message on social justice. Some of the things that his church did was tapping into the social welfare such as feeding the homeless, taking care of the elderly and providing the needs of the underclass. He also used it to reach people who were open to these messages, but at the same time were opposed to communism on religious grounds<sup>21</sup>.

It's interesting to note that he attracted people from all different walks of life, no matter their ages, race, religion or sects. This was where the idea of social class came in. He believed everyone was equal and should be allowed to live in

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/jonestown-jim-jones-mass-murder-suicide>

freedom, separate from the government. It didn't matter how a person lived, or what they did, what mattered was that everyone was part of a "community". Everyone lives together, shares everything, both in items, personal matter, religion, and relationships. Nothing is hidden in their privacy of their homes, everything is brought out in the open. No one is better than the other<sup>22</sup>.

Throughout the 1960's the economy was not good. Many parts of the world were poor and many people lived in poverty without nothing. Equality was an issue and the way certain classes were treated, were horrendous. One race going against another was grueling and uncalled for<sup>23</sup>.

It's through this technique that made Jim Jones very successful. It is believed that many in his congregation had no one to "father" them and the "family" concept in the church was real. He drew crowds in the church with the focus on "family" and the "look" of a family atmosphere<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> [https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page\\_id=64856](https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=64856)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/jonestown-jim-jones-mass-murder-suicide>

It is interesting to note that many churches today use this very concept. Every religion had a concept for the theme on “family”. From the Mormon religion<sup>25</sup>, who believes that having children increases the legitimacy of the church, and finally to the Catholics, who believe children should be raised in strict households. In all areas of life, family is the key to everyday life<sup>26</sup>.

In the same way, the people’s temple was very much like that. The vision of the church in the early days was that everyone in the church was to be a family and the community was to live a family styled life.

As Jim Jones became popular and his church grew, the lust for control of his congregation grew with it. As he became involved with drugs, and his paranoia became more and more common, the need to control his congregation became very brutal<sup>27</sup>.

Jim Jones as a master of manipulation. Jones got it in his head that people were looking for social justice, physical healing, and alternatives to traditional religion. Many components included going to church, singing hymns and listening to preachers give a word. Most importantly he pushed for integration of black and

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<sup>25</sup> Lectures in Class

<sup>26</sup> Raised Catholic in my early days

white into one homogenous society. This allowed him to bring him in many African Americans, including many sympathetic whites. While the movement initially had the outward appearance of a church, as time went on, it eventually turned into a social movement than a religion.

One of the ways he helped spread word was through the use of tour buses. Every summer they would travel to far away cities in the United States, and he convinced people to leave their lives behind and join his commune in California.

However as people started going in, he ended up bringing fear in the stories he told. He spoke about distrust pertaining to the United States Government regarding such actions, such as the Vietnam War, the inactions of the white supremacy movement, the removal of blacks from the United States, and the supposed discrimination of races and society.

In all of this, he was using every opportunity to build up the idea of Communism. He would present this as a “utopia “in the minds of his followers. He undermined anyone or anything that had a contrary narrative to his so that his followers would only believe his ideas. Some of the tactics he used included keeping his community secluded in a tight community, not allowing people to leave on their own free will, sleep depriving his followers so they wouldn't be able

to think for themselves, and keeping armed guards at the gates. Leading up to this, he had to gain influence from the political scene.

Jim Jones got himself involved into the political life in the state of California. Unlike many other pastors of his time, he gained a lot of influences.

Jim Jones received a lot of favorable treatment from many people. Through the use of political leverage, he gained relationships with local, state, and governmental politicians, Jim Jones earned the opportunity to gain many interviews with private audiences, many of which were important people.

At the same time, Jones would instruct his people to vote in single blocs and had them spend countless hours campaigning for political allies<sup>28</sup>.

In order to accomplish his feat, Jim Jones worked to solve the building of fear in the hearts and minds of his members. In the early days of the movement, he used the idea of communal-like existence.<sup>29</sup> He wanted to create a place where people felt safe from persecution and where people could express their ideas. Although these ideas were good, as time went on,

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<sup>28</sup> Gaining the attention of the political world allowed Jim Jones to become popular

<sup>29</sup> Rousselet, M., O. Duretete, J.B. Hardouin, and M. Grall-Bronnec. "Cult Membership: What Factors Contribute to Joining or Leaving?" *Psychiatry Research*. Elsevier, July 10, 2017.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178116319941>.

On November 18, 1978, Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple living in Jonestown, Guyana, took part in the largest mass murder in history. Although the numbers differ in many articles, the number of those who lost their lives stood at 912 people. The cause of death was cyanide-laced drinks<sup>30</sup>.

Of those who passed away, the children were the largest number to die. Even with these facts, the question remains, what factors allowed a religious leader like Jim Jones to have control over these followers?

First, Jim Jones grew up as an outcast on society. He understood troubled life as a minority. He knew that he was not accepted. Second, Jim Jones witnessed the struggles that black Americans were having. During the 1960's time period, the lack of equality in public society allowed him to create a place where they felt accepted<sup>31</sup>. Third, many survivors and former people temple members described how every single person had a purpose. Many felt incredibly special to be there and at the same time they knew they could be involved in a many causes<sup>32</sup>. Fourth, in society many of these people suffered with lack of

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<sup>30</sup>Film, "[Jonestown: Paradise Lost](#)", Accessed November 14, 2019

<sup>31</sup> *The Guyana Tragedy: the Story of Jim Jones*, n.d.

<sup>32</sup> *The Guyana Tragedy: the Story of Jim Jones*, n.d.

government support. They trusted Jim Jones to help them through many ordeals.

They trusted the church to help them overcome the pain that was within them, and in order to allow this to happen, they let Jim Jones gain their trust. He made it so that they felt that he could help them. Jim Jones was there to help them build a foundation<sup>33</sup>. Fifth, Jim Jones convinced many people that he was doing great things in the community. He united the races, and helped change the racist attitudes amongst his followers... He supported the poor and the elderly.

So how did the event lead to that fateful day?

First, He betrayed his followers. He misled them to believe that he was “God”. He misled them to believe that he was perfect in many ways. Many things he preached about allowed him to think that it the right thing<sup>34</sup>.

The next question is, how did he make them feel bad? If a person took luxuries for themselves, then they were made to feel guilty. Many luxuries were not only physical things, but also mental things, such as sleep. His members were forced to

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<sup>33</sup> McBirnie, William Stewart. *The Untold Story of Jonestown! Jim Jones: Christian or Antichrist? Charlatan or Communist?* Glendale, CA: C.C.A., 1979.

<sup>34</sup> *The Guyana Tragedy: the Story of Jim Jones*, n.d.



feel bad if they slept or rested too much as there were always things to do in the temple.

One documentary talks about how much sleep a temple worker would have in their day to day activities “We would let each other know next day, well, how long you slept, I slept two hours, you only slept two, and well I slept an hour and a half”<sup>35</sup>.

The consequences of this meant that the people would stop thinking clearly. This was a key way to control all of his followers because they would simply go along with what he told them. Many survivors would describe how they were kept very busy with hardly any time to sleep, with little energy and the use of no brain power. “It meant that if they worked in the temple fulltime, they worked long hours, very little sleep. Others would describe how the longest many of them stayed awake were seven or more days without any sleep, including without having any coffee, no nothing.”<sup>36</sup> In that sense it meant that the temple workers would go days without sleep, or if they slept at all, it be between 2-4 hours daily and in this sense, many would suffer health and medical problems. Also, “Being in an environment where they are constantly up, constantly busy and

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<sup>35</sup> Film “Jonestown, A Jungle Paradise, Accessed November 14, 2019

<sup>36</sup> Film “Jonestown, A jungle Paradise”, Accessed November 14, 2019

they've been made to feel guilty if they took many luxuries like sleeping<sup>37</sup>. They felt guilty if they did that, and many described the control that Jim Jones had over their lives.

These statements were used to describe what life was like in Jonestown. Also it was used to describe the treatment the people received. Jim Jones was a leader known to control their thoughts, way of life and behavior. In this way, it was easy to see why many trusted him, and it was easy to see why many refused to argue or oppose him in any way<sup>38</sup>.

One of the techniques, Jim Jones used was called "white nights". This was a practice used in the event in that they were under attack. Most often it was carried out in case a mass suicide was to happen. As nothing happened in many cases, the members stopped taking these seriously.

The reason why it happened was because Jim said that it was a test of loyalty. Many thought it was going to be for real. It was meant to give them a false sense of security. It also forced them to build their trust in him. If it wasn't

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<sup>37</sup> Film "The Jonestown Massacre, Paradise Lost (Cult Documentary), Accessed November 14, 2019

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.rebelcircus.com/blog/the-twisted-sex-life-of-the-reverend-jim-jones-god...>

for them being deprived of sleep and being force to stay awake at all hours of the night, then Jim Jones could have lost control of his followers.

The purpose of the Peoples Temple was to provide a home and a place of refuge for people from all different backgrounds and beliefs. Improvements in their lives was also another key focus of the ministry. Throughout the years, Jim Jones followers felt that they finally had something to live for as well as something to be a part of. He provided a home and a sense of purpose for many who felt adrift in America's Consuming capitalist order. He provided a home and a sense of purpose to many who felt adrift in America's consumer-capitalist order.

Allowing his followers to be a part of the movement inspired them to try harder at their jobs. It allowed the younger generation to pursue college degrees and allowed many followers to forget the errors of their ways. Many of them saw it as a way to make changes in their lives. In order for them to be successful, it made them realize that it was through their own hard work and determination to better their lifestyles. . He had a lot of well educated, up and coming people who were deeply dissatisfied with the culture that had produced them and were looking for something they felt to be more genuine. Jones promised them this and was popular because of it.

In many accounts from survivors, many exclaimed how some had flunked out of college, how others had brief marriages, how others went through many dramatic experiences, such as shootings, and murders in their houses and how some had been hospitalized with a STD or other medical conditions. Many others had failing marriages or relationships, many went through near-fatal experiences.

The transformation people had in the church were extensive as many former drug addicts, prostitutes, disabled, and, disillusioned people gave their lives to Christ. However the consequence to joining the movement was that they put too much faith and loyalty to Jim Jones.

Women found Jim Jones desirable and attractive, and in many ways, sexually aroused. Men found Jim Jones as a role model and somebody they could count on. To many, Jim Jones became a charismatic leader. Many of his followers believed that Jim Jones was as a good person. He was known to help people out in many ways. Jim Jones understood the troubles of minorities and he empathized with many followers. Many survivors testified that if a person put their trust and faith in him, then he would reward them. Many testified that the reason why it was so successful in the early days was because of their dental, medical and social security needs were all taken care of.

In order to understand what a cult is, there are three major factors that are involved. The reason why it's added, is because there will be a comparison between Jim Jones and other cults. This will be in order to identify the popularity of all the leaders<sup>39</sup>. The first factor is distinctive rituals devoted to a God or person. This means that each cult leader believes that their followers, have to believe what they say<sup>40</sup>. Jim Jones spoke about issues that resonated in people's hearts. And so that was how he was able to draw crowds into his church. The second factor is called the "Isolation factor". This means that each cult was isolated from society and they are kept in their own world. For example, members of the Heavens Cult lived isolated from the public and they lived in a group, separated from family and friends. Other cults lived in compounds, and others, like Jonestown, lived-in a jungle<sup>41</sup>. When Jim Jones moved his movement to Guyana, the purpose was isolate his people from regular society, where they wouldn't be persecuted or talked about in the media. The third factor of a cult is

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.toptentopia.com/the-10-most-famous-cults-in-united-states-history>

<sup>40</sup> Rousselet, M., O. Duretete, J.B. Hardouin, and M. Grall-Bronnec. "Cult Membership: What Factors Contribute to Joining or Leaving?" *Psychiatry Research*. Elsevier, July 10, 2017.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178116319941>.

to have a charismatic figure lead the group. In order for a cult to be successful, they need to have a charismatic leader who's willing to lead them<sup>42</sup>.

How does this compare to the Jim Jones Massacre? Well to begin with both Jim Jones was accused of murder in his respected community. It's been told that Jim Jones used murder, to control many of his followers. Wiretapping was also a ruse, mentioned in many documentaries. Although food poisoning wasn't known to happen in Jonestown, the injecting of cyanide laced-soda was close to it. Violence and sexual immorality was also a factor in both cults<sup>43</sup>.

Many leaders from various cults shared a common trait, and that had to do with their charismatic ways. They used their words carefully when drawing crowds. They allowed their followers to feel accepted, even when society rejected them. They manipulated their followers with promises of security, love, equality, and improvement for their lives. They isolated them from society, telling them the

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<sup>42</sup> Rousselet, M., O. Duretete, J.B. Hardouin, and M. Grall-Bronnec. "Cult Membership: What Factors Contribute to Joining or Leaving?" *Psychiatry Research*. Elsevier, July 10, 2017.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178116319941>.

<sup>43</sup> *The Guyana Tragedy: the Story of Jim Jones*, n.d.

world brainwash them in many ways and if they followed them, they would know the path to Heaven. In a simple explanation, in order to keep their popularity, they had to win over the most vulnerable, downtrodden and rejected people that the world wouldn't accept<sup>44</sup>.

Each leader had a different approach when it came to spreading their message and getting noticed by the officials in the religious and political world. Some avoided them, some told lies about them and some even fought against them. The shootout between David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco Texas was an example of this. However Jim Jones, in the early days of the people's temple was set apart from many of them in his own way.

One way that made Jim Jones set apart from other cult leaders, was his influence to gain the trust of many political and government leaders. From Presidents, to mayoral candidates, to assembly men, to first ladies, and many leaders of different countries, Jim Jones was able to influence them into thinking

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<sup>44</sup> Rousselet, M., O. Duretete, J.B. Hardouin, and M. Grall-Bronnec. "Cult Membership: What Factors Contribute to Joining or Leaving?" *Psychiatry Research*. Elsevier, July 10, 2017.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178116319941>.

that his movement was doing well and that they were spreading the ideologies of God.

In the next section of this paper, this will be discussed along with a few events that took place, in which his movement was praised for the good works that they did for the community and his congregation<sup>45</sup>.

Unlike most cult leaders, Jim Jones was able to gain public support and contact with many prominent politicians at the local and national level. During the 1976 election, Walter Mondale was the Vice Presidential Candidate. Jim Jones got the chance to meet with him privately. Later, Rosalynn Carter, wife of Jimmy Carter met with Jones on many occasions. In 1977, Assemblyman Willie Brown of California served as master of ceremonies at a testimonial dinner for Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple.

This special event was attended by many highly influential politicians including both the governor and the lieutenant state of California, Jerry Brown and Mervyn Dermally. At the dinner Brown praised Jones with his phrase “What you should see every day when you look in the mirror in the early morning hours is a combination of Martin Luther King Jr., Angela Davis, and Albert Einstein and

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<sup>45</sup> NBC News “Full Episode, Jonestown, An American Tragedy”, Accessed November 14, 2019



Chairman Mao"<sup>46</sup>. Harvey Milk, who was the first openly gay commissioner of San Francisco, spoke at many political rallies for the Peoples Temple<sup>47</sup>.

Everywhere he went, many leaders flocked to him because they wanted to know what he was about. He built up that trust with everyone, and in many circumstances, people didn't expect a thing.

In conclusion, Jim Jones was popular because of the message he taught, the people he invited to be in his church, and the experiences he had to endure. In order to promote his ministry, he had to convince his followers that there was a better life than what they had. He did it with the inviting people of all different backgrounds, culture and beliefs in, as well as people who were on drugs, depression, bad marriages, bad relationships, downtrodden, and homeless. He focused on all the issues that were going on in society during his time period, and he brought all in under one roof.

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<sup>46</sup> Rosenberg, Jennifer. "Biography of Jim Jones, Leader of the Peoples Temple Cult." ThoughtCo. ThoughtCo, July 3,

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