Jonestown Encyclopedia Article

Jonestown

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Officially known as the People's Temple, this community of American religious zealots who lived and died in the small South American country of Guyana during the 1970s has become synonymous with fanatical cultism and mass suicide. The group had originated in northern California under the leadership of pastor Jim Jones. As Jones became increasingly megalomaniacal and unstable, he relocated his church and its followers to an isolated jungle compound, where he used brainwashing tactics to break their will and force them to comply with his demands. Government officials in the United States became concerned after hearing reports of church members being held against their will, and a delegation was sent to investigate. After a violent confrontation between cultists and the delegation, Jones ordered his followers to commit suicide by drinking a cyanide potion. Those who refused were shot. When United States officials entered the compound on November 18, 1978, they found 914 bodies, including that of Jones himself.

Dead bodies fill the Peoples Temple compound after mass suicide in Jonestown, Guyana.

Further Reading:

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Kilduff, Marshall, and Ron Javers. *The Suicide Cult.* New York, Bantam Books, 1978.

Krause, Charles. *Guyana Massacre: The Eyewitness Account.* New York, Berkley Books, 1978.