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## Inventory of the Responses to Jonestown Collection

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## Inventory of the Responses to Jonestown Collection

### Collection number: GTU 99-11-01

Graduate Theological Union Archives  
Graduate Theological Union  
Berkeley, California

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Responses to Jonestown

**Dates:** 1978-1979

**Collection number:** GTU 99-11-01

**Collector:** GTU Library Staff

**Collection Size:** .5 linear feet (1 box, 1 folio)

**Repository:** The Graduate Theological Union. Library.

Berkeley, CA 94709

**Abstract:** This collection consists of newspaper articles, periodical articles, and sermons reporting or commenting on the Jonestown mass suicide in Guyana, November 1978. The Graduate Theological Union Library staff solicited and collected the materials from various sources.

**Physical location:** 2//3

**Languages:** Languages represented in the collection: English

### Access

Collection is open for research.

### Publication Rights

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### Preferred Citation

Responses to Jonestown, GTU 99-11-01. Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, CA.

### Acquisition Information

This collection was collected by GTU Library Reference Staff in the months following the tragedy in Jonestown to provide library patrons with information concerning the events and responses to the events. The Staff advertised in various denominational publications requesting original material. The advertisement is found in File Folder 1.

### Biography / Administrative History

The tragedy in Jonestown, Guyana, South America occurred on November 18, 1978. On that date, over 900 people lost their lives.

Jim Jones, born 1931 in Lynn, Indiana, opened the Peoples Temple in Indianapolis in 1956. With strong beliefs in civil rights and advocacy for the poor, he intended the Temple to be a fully integrated congregation. He also wanted a strong personal control over the congregation. These dual tendencies of social justice and personal control were to become more and more pronounced with time. In 1963, the independent church associated with the Disciples of Christ, and in 1965 Jones was ordained in that denomination. He began to do faith healing, claiming especially that he could cure cancer. Citing pending nuclear holocaust, Jones moved the Peoples Temple congregation of approximately 100 to Redwood Valley, California.

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Membership began to rise. The compound, buildings, and programs continued to expand. Armed guards patrolled the compound. Revivals and faith healing services were held throughout California.

With a continually growing congregation, in 1972 the Temple moved to San Francisco, and another was opened in Los Angeles. They had a newspaper and a local radio show. Jones became increasingly involved in politics. Because of his work in social justice issues, he supported and was supported by several liberal San Francisco and California political leaders. Meanwhile, his personal manipulation, coercion and control of his congregation grew stronger.

By 1977, as former members began to speak out about Jones and the Temple, he began to come under scrutiny by the press and concerned relatives of Temple members. Stories circulated of fraudulent faith healing, questionable finances, welfare fraud, sexual scandal, beatings, drugs, and the use of weapons. As early as 1974, Jones had purchased land in Guyana and set up a settlement of about 50 persons to create a promised land. Increasingly negative publicity and increasing paranoia led Jones to again cite a pending nuclear holocaust and race wars to move the full Peoples Temple congregation to Guyana.

The settlement was now called Jonestown. It was in a remote area, a thick jungle, in which the conditions for the people were extremely difficult. There was little food, the housing was inadequate, the forced work exhausting and unrelenting. Beatings and torture were used to keep the people in line. Armed guards patrolled continually. Jones made threats of mass suicide as early as 1977, and held White Night weekly, rehearsing the congregation in suicide.

The rumors about conditions in Jonestown continued to circulate. Concerned relatives began to push California Congressman Leo Ryan to investigate. He responded and organized a trip to Guyana for himself, the press, and concerned relatives. Because of its remote location, they flew to an airstrip several miles from Jonestown on November 17, 1978, driving the rest of the way by truck. The visit, that day and the following, was tightly monitored and choreographed by Jones. Even so, on the second day of the visit, November 18, about 20 people asked the Congressman to take them out of Jonestown. The people were loaded on the truck and driven to the airstrip. Jonestown guards followed and opened fire as the people were boarding the planes to depart. Leo Ryan, two reporters, and some who had tried to escape with them were killed.

In Jonestown, Jim Jones led the people to mass suicide by having them drink punch laden with cyanide. Those who did not do so willingly were forced. Some people were killed by gunfire, some by having their throats slashed. Jim Jones was found dead of gunshot wounds. In all, 922 people died in Jonestown on November 18, 1978.

This tragedy was greeted by world wide shock, and prompted great speculation as to how and why such an event could happen. The religious community responded to the tragedy with an outpouring of articles, sermons, and statements, from denominations, organizations, and individuals all trying to understand how this could happen, and what were the theological, spiritual, and personal lessons to be learned from such a tragedy.

#### **Scope and Content of Collection**

The materials were divided into three sections: Newspaper Articles, Sermons, and Journal Articles. These were housed in three separate black three-ring binders. The newsclippings have been photocopied, and the originals discarded except for the complete editions of two newspapers found in Folio 1: Guyana Chronicle and the Caribbean Contact.

#### **Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

#### **Subjects**

Jones, Jim, 1931-1978.

Peoples Temple.

Jonestown Mass Suicide, Jonestown, Guyana, 1978.

#### **Bibliography**

Marshall Kilduff and Ron Javers, *The Suicide Cult: The Inside Story of the Peoples Temple Sect and the Massacre in Guyana*. Bantam Books: NY, 1978.

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**1 Newspaper Articles Nov 1978-Jan 1979**

**Physical Description:** 26 folders, 1 folio

**Scope and Content Note**

Box 1, Folders 1-31. Arranged chronologically. Includes articles from various U.S. denominational newspapers. Of particular interest are the articles from Caribbean newspapers: the Express (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad), Catholic News (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad), Guyana Chronicle (Georgetown, Guyana) and the Caribbean Contact (Bridgetown, Barbados).

Folio 1. A full original special edition of Guyana Chronicle, Dec. 6, 1978, and a full original edition of the Caribbean Contact, Dec. 1978.

**2 Sermons June 1978-Mar 1979**

**Physical Description:** 32 folders

**Scope and Content Note**

Box 1. Folders 27-59. Arranged alphabetically by author.

box-folder 1:27

folder 28

folder 29

folder 30

folder 31

folder 32

folder 33

folder 34

folder 35

folder 36

folder 37

folder 38

folder 39

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folder 59

**Anonymous, "You Will Know Them by Their Fruits"**

**Statement from the Berkeley, CA, Area Interfaith Council**

**Balfour Brickner, "America's Dream Time"**

**John E. Burciaga, "Lessons of the Guyana Tragedy"**

**Ann W. Carson, "Is Life Spelled Backwards"**

**William P. Clancey, untitled**

**Max Coots, "The Cult Mentality"**

**John A. Crane, "The Meaning of the Jonestown Disaster"**

**Roger Fritts, "Children of Yearning"**

**Harmon M. Gehr, "Cults and the Bicameral Mind"**

**Dale W. Hallberg, "The Guyana Experiment"**

**Richard C. Herbert, "Jonestown: The Poisoned Flock"**

**George L. Hunt, "Christianity and Cults"**

**Jerry James, "The Sins of the Fathers are Visited Upon Us - Now What"**

**Louis W. Jones, untitled**

**Andrew C. Kennedy, "A Little Bit of Jonestown in All of Us"**

**Kenneth V. Kettlewell, "Jonestown - Everytown"**

**Keith Krebs, untitled**

**Marjorie N. Leaming, "The Unitarian Universalist Movement or How to Fill a Sieve"**

**James A. Magaw, "Why Does Religious Fanaticism Still Prosper?"**

**Robert S. Magee, "The People's Temple Commune"**

**Raymond G. Manker, "Of Cyanide in Kool-aid"**

**Robert A. McKenzie, "The Day of Our Lord"**

**Hugh M. Miller, "The Church and the Sunshine Law"**

**Spiller Milton, "Testing the Witness of the Spirit Scripture"**

**John V. Moore, "A Witness to Tragedy and Resurrection" (see also 75, reprint of sermon in Church at Work)**

**Dwyn M. Mounger, "Guyana, Guilt, and Grace"**

**Donald L. Padget, "Reflections on Guyana"**

**Kenneth W. Phifer, "A Nightmare Come True"**

**Bob Rowell, "Religions and Cults"**

**Paul Sawyer, "Thru a Glass Darkly"**

**Ernest H. Sommerfeld, "The Missing Word"**

**Charles S. Stephen, "A Passionate Intensity"**

**3 Journal Articles June 1978-Mar 1979**

**Physical Description:** 28 folders

**Scope and Content Note**

Box 1. Folders 60-88. Arranged alphabetically by author.

folder 60

**Joan Beck, "Many Questions Raised by Jonestown Tragedy," *Lutheran Standard***

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| folder 61 | <b>David Bergner, "What Can We Learn from People's Temple" and "Who Joins Cults",</b><br><b><i>The Church Herald</i></b>                                       |
| folder 62 | <b>C.F. Bowen, Editorial, "To Whom Are We Giving God's Money,"</b> <i>The Free Will Baptist</i>  |
| folder 63 | <b>Robert C. Cunningham, Editorial, "Sometimes the Cup We Have to Drink is Bitter,"</b><br><b><i>Pentecostal Evangelical</i></b>                               |
| folder 64 | <b>Editorial, "The Dark Night of Jonestown,"</b> <i>America</i>  |
| folder 65 | <b>Editorial, <i>White Wing Messenger</i></b>  |
| folder 66 | <b>Editorial, "Holocaust in the Jungle,"</b> <i>The Sabbath Recorder</i>   |
| folder 67 | <b>Editorials, <i>New World Outlook</i></b>  |
| folder 68 | <b>Howard G. Hageman, "Mindless Religion,"</b> journal unknown   |
| folder 69 | <b>Steve A. Igarta, "The Cry of Jonestown,"</b> (typed mss)  |
| folder 70 | <b>Philip E. Jenks, "Fanatics and the Merely Faithful,"</b> <i>American Baptist Magazine</i>   |
| folder 71 | <b>R.J. Kerstan, Editorial, "A Lesson from the Jonestown Tragedy,"</b> <i>Baptist Herald</i>   |
| folder 72 | <b>Robert Lochhaas, "Guyana Tragedy Reminds Us to Test All Prophets Against</b><br><b>Scripture,"</b> <i>Reporter</i>  |
| folder 73 | <b>James L. Merrell, "Jonestown: Some Reflections,"</b> <i>The Disciple</i>  |
| folder 74 | <b>Howard Moody, "Jonestown and Ourselves,"</b> <i>Christianity and Crisis</i>   |
| folder 75 | <b>John V. Moore, "Are There People Free Enough and Strong Enough",</b> <i>Northern</i><br><i>California Ecumenical Council, Church at Work, Special Issue</i> |
| folder 76 | <b>A.F.N., "Risk Factors in Religious Freedom,"</b> <i>Vital Christianity</i>  |
| folder 77 | <b>Opinions, "Hear, Hear,"</b> <i>Gospel Herald</i>  |
| folder 78 | <b>David W. Preus, "Trust Jesus, Not Religious Fads,"</b> <i>Lutheran Standard</i>   |
| folder 79 | <b>Kenneth Reed and James Rhodes, "Kinship with People's Temple,"</b> <i>Forum</i>   |
| folder 80 | <b>John E. Roberts, Editorial, "New Awareness of Evil Cults,"</b> <i>The Baptist Courier</i>   |
| folder 81 | <b>John Somerville, "Jonestown Parallel,"</b> <i>The Churchman</i>   |
| folder 82 | <b>J.S., "Playing God in Guyana,"</b> <i>The Church Herald</i>   |
| folder 83 | <b>P.A.S. (possibly Paul A. Schwartz), "People's Temple and the Cults,"</b> <i>New Religious</i><br><i>Movements Newsletter</i>                                |
| folder 84 | <b>Kermon Thomasson, "How Many Miles to Jonestown,"</b> <i>Messenger</i>   |
| folder 85 | <b>Paul A. Tidemann, "People's Temple and the Churches in Guyana,"</b> journal unknown   |
| folder 86 | <b>Edgar R. Trexler, "Getting to the Heart of Christmas,"</b> <i>The Lutheran</i>  |
| folder 87 | <b>Richard D. Tropp, "A Socialist-Christian Society," 6-7/1978,</b> <i>The Churchman</i>   |
| folder 88 | <b>K.H.W., "Jonestown in Retrospect,"</b> <i>Adventist Review</i>  |