

PART 3:

ACT 4: JONESTOWN

As tensions rose and control slowly slipped from Jones' hands, he had to devise a quick plan - an escape from American media and growing investigations into the Temple.

Jones didn't only select Guyana because of its remoteness, but also because he wanted to build a socialist, racially integrated society. The Guyanese government welcomed them warmly, seeing the political and social benefits the Temple would bring.

He sends the Pioneers ahead of him to start construction of Jonestown and convinces almost, if not all of his congregants to move with him to the utopia where they could live communally, far away from the US's scrutiny.

Temple members arrived in Georgetown, Guyana and travelled overland and by river to get to the commune. The trip was exhausting, the heat was unbearable, the fatigue unrelenting.

Yet, when they reached Jonestown, the Pioneers welcomed them warmly, but for a paradisaal commune, Jonestown was the complete opposite of what many members expected.

Thom (Thomas) Bogue (survivor):

"We are building a place where we can be left alone. We will have our own utopian society – live under our own rules."

The commune was a raw tropical settlement, with uncompleted huts and cramped living spaces, inducing a wave of mass sickness among the people as mosquitoes were rampant in the local jungle ecosystem. Food was also a constant struggle. Soil was difficult and shipments unreliable. Days turned into months of arduous work; clearing the land, building huts, farming and producing whatever the Temple planned to sell. The added heat made the work unbearable for many members; however, their complaints were only met with embarrassment and punishment.

Punishment didn't only follow the Peoples Temple from California to Jonestown, but also intensified as Jones' drug use significantly increased.

The Temple ran a Special Care Unit where nonconformists were sent to get “treatment” - this **wasn’t** a normal clinic at all. Dissidents, defectors and people who were ill were sent there to be drugged and isolated, sometimes for extended periods to keep them compliant and acquiescent.

You would think at least, some quietness would help members process that they were trapped in a remote jungle land with a paranoid preacher. However, **Jonestown had a PA system and loudspeakers that echoed Jones’ voice day and night.**

Information was refiltered and reframed, so members only heard what Jones wanted them to hear. Jones only taught of God when it benefited him. However, as his Marxist ideals took hold, he spoke more about obedience and loyalty to the cause- all which pointed back to him. He painted the world and everything outside the Peoples Temple as a hostile enemy and Jonestown as the only place where they could belong.

These narratives were repeated to the point that they shaped the perspectives Jones wanted them to have about the world and caused them to accept that leaving Jonestown meant abandoning your family, your faith and your future.

Jones relentlessly reminded Members that leaving Jonestown was impossible. Their passports had been confiscated upon arrival and security guards meant to protect them watched with piercing eyes - a quiet dare: try and you’ll fail. With no other alternatives to protecting themselves from threats in and out, why wouldn’t they see extremes as rational? The final orders were met with mass compliance because it was, to them, the only means of true survival.

ACT 5: WHITE NIGHTS

Jones held White Nights -community meetings in which he told them that an insurmountable challenge faced them and the only way to save themselves was by committing “revolutionary suicide” . Most Members had been conditioned to obey at all costs, but some people protested. And they were sent to the Special Care Unit. In Jonestown, to question was sin, obedience was salvation.

The abuse of Members reaches a new high as Jones takes his addictions to a higher level. On at least two occasions, simulated mass suicides were rehearsed.

According to Deborah Layton, an ex-member, on one such occasion, everyone, including the children, was told to line up and given a small glass of red liquid to drink. They were told it was deadly. That they would last only for a short time. When the time came for them to go, Jones explained that the poison was not real and that they had just been through a loyalty test. By that time, fear had been rooted in their spirits, and tragedy was inevitable.

Meanwhile, a group of Concerned Relatives rallied to journalists and government officials to pick up the case - worried their relatives were running out of time.

Congressman Leo Ryan was friends with the father of Bob Houston, a Temple member whose body was found near train tracks in October 1976, just three days after a taped telephone conversation with his ex-wife in which leaving the Temple was discussed.

Ryan's interest was further aroused by allegations put forth by Layton and the Concerned Relatives regarding Jonestown and reported human rights abuses. Maybe, he might pick the case.