



The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and Peoples Temple

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By the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Manson*, the comprehensive, authoritative, and tragic story of preacher Jim Jones, who was responsible for the Jonestown Massacre—the largest murder-suicide in American history.

In the 1950s, a young Indianapolis minister named Jim Jones preached a curious blend of the gospel and Marxism. His congregation was racially integrated, and he was a much-lauded leader in the contemporary civil rights movement. Eventually, Jones moved his church, Peoples Temple, to northern California. He became involved in electoral politics, and soon was a prominent Bay Area leader.

In this riveting narrative, Jeff Guinn examines Jones's life, from his extramarital affairs, drug use, and fraudulent faith healing to the fraught decision to move almost a thousand of his followers to a settlement in the jungles of Guyana in South America. Guinn provides stunning new details of the events leading to the fatal day in November, 1978 when more than nine hundred people died—including almost three hundred infants and children—after being ordered to swallow a cyanide-laced drink.

Guinn examined thousands of pages of FBI files on the case, including material released during the course of his research. He traveled to Jones's Indiana hometown, where he spoke to people never previously interviewed, and uncovered fresh information from Jonestown survivors. He even visited the Jonestown site with the same pilot who flew there the day that Congressman Leo Ryan was murdered on Jones's orders. *The Road to Jonestown* is the definitive book about Jim Jones and the events that led to the tragedy at Jonestown.

The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and Peoples Temple Details

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From Reader Review The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and Peoples Temple for online ebook

Mary ~Ravager of Tomes~ says

So I've always sort of had a grim fascination with cults & extreme religious groups. It's one of humanity's most despicable tendencies, but it's incredibly interesting to me to see how groups of otherwise intelligent people become entrapped in factions like this that are so easy to condemn in hindsight.

This story in particular held my attention because:

1. Many folks I know were actually alive when the tragedy of Jim Jones & Peoples Temple came about, as it happened in the late 70's. This makes the story feel very relevant.
2. Until I stumbled across this book, I was under the impression that Jones himself was a religious zealot & that his cult was formed wholly around a religious purpose.

Upon finishing, I see that this cult was actually formed upon a basis of social change, **but under a religious guise.**

Jim Jones is well known for performing his "miracles," calling himself a reincarnation of God, etc., but for some reason I had never really heard that the driving force behind his organization was actually **Socialism**. But while Jones was impressed with the aspects of a Socialist society that brought equal wealth & opportunity to all, it's not accurate to say that he successfully represented the ideals he preached.

For example, author Jeff Guinn notes that Jones' ideology specifically sought to alleviate the plight of African-Americans, but the social structure of his temple never empowered members of his African-American congregation.

Guinn does an excellent job taking readers through the life of Jones from his early childhood up to the events at the end of his life that made him infamous, noting the aspects of his upbringing & personality that created the perfect combination for a successful, manipulative leader. The story of Jones' life is pieced together in a way that makes it clear how his web of influence slowly grew into an intimidating & unquestionable force that lured so many to their deaths.

It's frightening to hear the snippets of testimony from survivors that are included in this biography. While many were devoted followers, still a notable number of folks who became entangled in Peoples Temple either began as dissenters or were privy to Jones' false performances. Some cited their reason for staying involved as having hope that Jones would really bring about social change, while others said that their gut instinct was overridden by the fact that so many other people they loved & respected were staying. *It can't be wrong if all these other people feel it's right, right?*

And this is exactly why it's so important for us to teach children early in their lives to **question everything, heed their own instincts, and know what it feels like to think for themselves**. I'm not necessarily saying that none of the members of Peoples Temple were capable of those things. **Tons of people throughout the history of human existence have fallen in behind dictators & religious leaders who have ultimately led them awry, and it's a foolish notion to believe you are not capable of falling into the same trap.**

But if there's anything to be taken from reading this story & others like it, it's the **importance** of familiarizing ourselves with what these situations look like & feel like. Recognizing the warning signs is one of the first defense mechanisms available when faced with a master manipulator. When people are able to confidently trust their own judgement, they become a lot more difficult to manipulate. When the next Jim Jones begins to gather followers, prior exposure to the concepts & tactics used by previous leaders could make all the difference.

This is an eye-opening & comprehensive biography, written in a logical & approachable way. **I recommend it for anyone & everyone who reads.**

Matt says

Pardon my rambling... my mind has not been this blown by a book in a long, long time!

First and foremost, a large thank you to NetGalley, Jeff Guinn, and Simon & Schuster for providing me with a copy of this book, which allows me to provide you with an unbiased review.

My ongoing trek though the world of biographies would not have been complete without a comprehensive piece about an individual who is often misunderstood in history. Jeff Guinn has provided this with his stellar piece on Jim Jones and the winding road to Jonestown, site of the infamous cult mass suicide in 1978. Guinn focusses the rise and power of Jim Jones, exemplifying his ability to hoard power and hone his leadership skills while captivating a following of the common person. Armed with the power of the delivered word and absolute authority, Jones sought not only to create the Peoples Temple to serve the disadvantaged, but also to instil complete loyalty in a socialist hierarchy, as contradictory as that might sound. The attentive and patient reader will discover countless examples of Jones' abilities as he becomes the textbook cult leader. (As it will surely rouse extensive debate, for the purposes of this review and my personal beliefs, I would define a 'cult' as an organisation premised on a certain type of beliefs, usually religious, whereby extrication is neither simple nor voluntary. I welcome those who wish to challenge me on this, though I do not bandy the word around for the fun of it!)

Raised in a highly dysfunctional home in Lynn, Indiana, Jones stuck out at school and could regularly be found making long-winded sermons alone in the woods or organising healing services for roadkill. This religious upbringing was fostered by his curiosity in the numerous evangelical Christian options around town, even though his parents were the only family not found at any Sunday services. By adulthood, with a young wife by his side, Jones continued to foster his preaching and healing skills, soon part of the revival tour around the state. His ultimate goal, to form his own church that would target lower-income individuals and trying to link up with established black churches in and around Indianapolis. With the Red Scare in full force, Jones sought to utilise some of the socialist 'equality for all' in his sermons, bringing hope to any who would grace the sanctuary. His message was less one of godliness, but of the need to integrate the races and help one another, all this in the late 1950s and into the 60s. Developing a strong base, Jones formed the Peoples Temple and rallied as many as would attend on a regular basis. Even at this early stage, Jones tried to create a sense of power and a hierarchy, where followers would rely on him to help them solve problems as long as they turn over all earthly possessions to the Temple. Guinn hints at a duplicity here, where Jones could completely overtake his followers, while remaining above the fray and living as he saw fit.

Always wanting more and seeing the lights of California, Jones turned his attention to Redwood Valley and the surrounding town of Ukiah, California. Situated between Los Angeles and San Francisco, Jones felt he

could work effectively by integrating into a smaller community, yet still be able to pull followers from both major metropolitan areas. He was so effective in having his followers join him because of the impending nuclear holocaust that was sure to come from the Soviets, having recently been deterred during the Cuban Missile Crisis. (Yes, more duplicity, as he rallied to the Soviet-style collectivist notion of equality for all, yet chose to sit at the end of all!) Jones knew how to use the news to his advantage, demanding blind faith and complete trust that he had revelations about what the Peoples Temple ought to do. While Jones had to reestablish himself out West, many scouts and a strong advertising campaign in the less affluent neighbourhoods brought new recruits along with those who had heard of this captivating preacher. From there, Guinn explores many of the sexual encounters that Jones had (and sanctioned) within the Temple, citing the need to de-stress or share communally, though only within the confines of fellow Temple folk. Jones cemented a stronger sense of communal ownership by Temple faithful, going so far as to require all children born into the group be raised communally, where they would see parents only when Jones saw fit. Sex led to drugs and soon Jones relied on that to keep him going, all while his wife stood by and loyally tried to digest what was going on. Guinn explores sentiments of jealousy and angst, though Jones never sought to enter into polygamous marriages, choosing instead to share his body and time with at least two women regularly and others on an as needed basis. How could Jones profess these beliefs and hold firm to the reins of power? As Guinn explains, there was significant verbal and physical abuse administered, which would push straying members into line. Be it calling people out in sermons, browbeating in meetings, or blackmailing in private, Jones made sure that he held the upper hand to ensure obedience. If a member sought to leave the fold, Jones had pre-signed documentation or blank sheets that he could use and submit to the authorities, thereby pigeon-holing any who might make idle threats. Guinn offers numerous examples of the lengths to which Jones would go to command attention and total control over the lives of Temple members, from the new recruits to his own wife, seen as the second-in-command of the entire organisation. Using his prowess to rally the troops, Jones became a favourite of the political candidates in the Bay Area, helping to secure votes and rallying the electorate, though the expectation was a system of quid pro quo, usually forgotten after the ballots were counted.

Negative press haunted Jones and he began developing an escape plan from California, looking to the small and recently independent country of Guyana. The country appealed to Jones, as it held strong socialist views as well as significant area for agricultural cultivation; a heavenly commune for collectivist living. Jones soon laid the foundation for the Temple's new home, aptly named Jonestown, which was isolated enough that government officials would not come knocking. Holding his followers in awe and paying for their travel, Jones brought hundreds down to the country in a series of trips, where they settled and the commune took shape, strengthening the idea of a cult, through geographic isolation, both from families and American authorities (Guyana had no extradition treaty with the United States). Legal actions were beginning in San Francisco courts by family members of those in the Peoples Temple, citing kidnapping or illicit seizure of property from members. This soon led to continued bad press, though only in those locations where the Temple had a footprint. This soon caused US Congressman Leo Ryan to organise a trip to investigate some of the concerns. Armed with scores of letters and members of the media, Ryan tried to explore the truthfulness of the Temple's assertions that all were happily residing in Guyana. He found few issues and only a handful of members who wished to leave. Guinn uses the last few chapters to explore the US expedition to Guyana and the fallout as Jones saw his complete control slipping away. Stunning writing on Guinn's part shows the lengths to which Jim Jones would go to hold complete control. The eventual mass suicide and assassination of the outsiders at the direction of the leader led to a body count of over 900, including Ryan himself. Jones and the entire Jonestown community soon became international headline news, having escaped much mention during their entire time in South America. The common (and erroneous) phrase that came out of those final hours in Jonestown remains "Don't drink the Kool-Aid [actually Flavor Aid]", which the reader will discover has lasted for decades since the event. All the same, the power Jones held over his followers is phenomenal and the reader will surely finish the book wondering

as much as understanding his sway.

Was Jim Jones an evil man or simply one who allowed power to go to his head? Even Guinn does not have a definitive answer, but this biography is so detailed and well-paced that the reader will surely come away with their own opinions. Many books have been written about Jonestown and Jim Jones, though all seem to offer sensationalised accounts of events or are completely weighted to one side, forcing the curious reader to sit through diatribes or blatant vilification. Guinn has used much time and effort to offer a complete look at the man, interviewing those who are still alive (due to age and the obvious sacrifice in Guyana) as well as all the documents he could recover to tell the story. A feat that not many would have taken, Guinn uses his wonderful narrative to tell the dénouement as honestly as he can. Like the other biography of his that I have read, Guinn forges headlong into the tough topics and questions, emerging with answers that defy simple religious or cultish vilification, which offers the reader a much more comprehensive approach. I can now speak about Jonestown with greater authority and understand much of the life of Jim Jones and what led him to that fateful day on November 18, 1978. I would strongly encourage anyone with the patience to read such a detailed tome to digest all that Guinn has to offer, for he refuses to sermonise, preventing the reader from, pardon the remark, "drinking the Kool-Aid".

Kudos, Mr. Guinn for your stunning effort with this piece. This is a sensational delivery of what has to be a very difficult topic. You have entertained, educated, and armed me for discussions about this and other cult groups, which seem to surround me as I forge ahead with more biographies.

Love/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

Michelle says

The Road to Jonestown- Jim Jones and Peoples Temple is among the best comprehensive and authoritative books written covering the Jonestown massacre that claimed the lives of 918 people in Guyana, South America on November 18, 1978. Author Jeff Guinn began his extensive research in 2014, and studied the fascinating story behind the grim and sensational media reports and headlines. There are thousands of documents and photographs contained in government archives on Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple, interviews with survivors and those associated including spouses, relatives, friends and others who shared valuable insight related to the tragedy: as a shocking truthful biographical portrait emerged of the Reverend James Warren Jones (1931-78).

The birth of Jim Jones (JJ) wasn't welcomed or celebrated; his mother Lynetta Putnam (1902-77) was profoundly disappointed with her third marriage to James Thurman Jones (1887-1951), a disabled WWI veteran. Though Lynetta believed her son would one day be a great man, she had no maternal instinct, remaining indifferent and detached from the growth and development of her only child. JJ learned from an early age to get the attention and acceptance he needed from sympathetic neighbors and relatives who often took him to church: there he would learn tactics to influence and manipulate others to ease his fragile ego and self-esteem. As a young man, JJ studied the writings of Marx, Stalin, and Hitler-- also Mahatma Gandhi. Once affiliated with the Communist party, his ideology was based on racial equality, economic and social justice; religion was used as a means to promote his agenda through the pulpit.

Marceline (Baldwin) Jones (m.1949-78) was stunned to learn JJ views on the Biblical gospel, and nearly divorced him. The desire to improve the world through socialism was more important and attainable; she

would always support this vision. The couple had one biological son, would be the first white family to adopt a black child, and added several mixed race children to their "Rainbow Family". Ronnie, their first foster child, protested adoption by Jones, demanding to be returned to his mother instead.

In 1965, JJ relocated Peoples Temple to Ukiah, CA. leaving the racially intolerant culture in Indiana; he also had an irrational fear of nuclear war. At the Redwood Valley location, the Temple reached the highest level of popularity and power, attracting followers from every walk of life. Members lived communally, pooling income and resources, caring for the sick, disabled, young and elderly in church sponsored homes. Social services of food banks, thrift stores, farming catered to the community and needs of the poor. JJ allegedly healed the sick and cast out demons, in dramatic charismatic services of loud singing and praise, preaching at the pulpit in dark glasses and long flowing robes. Underneath it all, there were highly disturbing things that were profoundly wrong with JJ, which Guinn discussed in a surprising non-judgmental manner. Most of the shocking aspects related to his conduct and behavior remained unknown to general membership.

By 1974, Peoples Temple had expanded to San Francisco, busloads of Temple members arrived at various political rallies, officials were elected that supported socialist causes and tolerance for racially diverse and LGBT populations. In 1976, additional concerns/problems involving Jones/Peoples Temple surfaced; leading to official investigations. Relatives of some Temple members were also greatly distressed that their loved ones were being held against their will, after JJ suddenly moved the majority of his followers to Jonestown. In a documentary narrative it was said that historians will need to examine and re-examine the tragedy of Jonestown throughout time. Visiting the site where Jonestown once stood was the most disturbing and difficult things Guinn had ever done. Following the massacre, the jungle reclaimed the haunted ground—it happened quickly, a simple memorial marker was placed at the site in honor of those so tragically lost. ~ Many thanks to Simon and Schuster via NetGalley for the direct digital copy for the purpose of review.

Lauren says

"Her fear was that a mass suicide would not be appreciated as a sincere and historic statement: 'I know we can't worry about how [what we do] will be interpreted... maybe in some 50 years someone will understand and perhaps be motivated. I don't have much illusion about all that. I just hate to see it all go for naught.'

- Carolyn Layton, Peoples Temple member, and mother of one of Jim Jones' children

Jeff Guinn lays everything out in *The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple* - he retraces the earliest days, Jones' childhood in rural Indiana, and catapults towards the last day in November 1978. The story is riveting - perhaps because we all know the ending and we are so curious how something could go so wayward and catastrophically wrong - and part because Guinn's research is so in-depth. He uses a multitude of sources: interviews with survivors and defectors, extensive records of the "church" (I hesitate to even call it that), and Jones' own rambling words - he recorded many sermons/diatribes and didn't hold anything back.

I knew the basics of the END of the story - but this book pays special attention to show the lives and the work of the Peoples Temple well before it turned into Jones' own megalomaniac playground (disputed when this actually started...)

A few things that I had no idea about, and now I know, thanks to this book:

- Peoples Temple helped hundreds, maybe thousands, of people with their social programs. Elder care, substance abuse rehab, lowering recidivism in urban areas, paying college tuition, alleviating hunger, providing housing/clothing to whomever asked... even digging a well and fixing septic tanks. These things are undeniable... however things really started to go south when Jones later demanded that members cash out their pensions, their retirements, and give all of their Social Security/disability checks and 100% of their savings to the Temple. Forget tithing - this was hundredthing.

- Not a surprise, but Jones was doped up for about a decade of his life. His signature dark sunglasses protected his incredibly bloodshot and sensitive eyes, although he claimed he needed to wear them to save other people from his laser vision.

- He was a charlatan and huckster from an early age. He continued this racket for years, claiming he could heal and bring people back from the dead. A favorite and often-used trick: chicken offal as "passed" cancerous tumors, produced by his planted members during healing services. Blech.

- As I mentioned before, I knew the end of the story, but I didn't know all of the things that lead up to the final event, specifically the involvement of Congressman Ryan and the media entourage. We get a play-by-play, and while Guinn is respectful in his writing, it is hard to read the details of those last few hours at Jonestown.

Guinn includes a sum up chapter with several updates and check-ins with people he has introduced over the book. I was surprised, however, that he didn't include a followup of Congresswoman Jackie Speier. As a survivor of the massacre (but not a member of the Peoples Temple), she has a very unique story to tell - and she shares some of it in this article, Congresswoman Left for Dead at Jonestown Recalls the Massacre, 37 Years Later but Guinn does not list her among the interviews, or provide any update on this elected official from the state of California. Curious that there wouldn't be a quote or even an interview in this book from an incumbent member of the US House of Representatives who has shared her story in other sources. Why not here in this new authoritative text?

One of the last sentences of the book struck me, shared by Jim Jones Jr., one of the surviving sons of Jim and Marceline Jones:

'Kool-Aid rather than equality is what the rest of the world remembers. The survivors are left to console themselves...' Jim Jones Jr. sighs, smiles, and concludes, 'What I'd say about Peoples Temple is, we failed, but damn, we tried.'

That quote stood out, in contrast to the first I shared, at the beginning of the post - "it all go for naught" to "Kool-Aid".

Highly recommended. Set some time aside, as you'll have a hard time putting this one down.

Carlos says

I am giving this book 5 stars because of how it chose to handle its theme, with facts, well researched mentions and from all perspectives possible. The story of Jonestown is one we all think we knowbut how did we get there...how was one man able to "dupe" thousands of people into killing themselves? could this have been prevented?who was Jim Jones and what did he want?all of these questions are

addressed by this author in this book and the narrative flows very smoothly...at times you forget this book is essentially the last hours of thousands of people and that one man was responsible for all of it . Was Jim Jones an evil person bent on taking as many down with him? ...or was he a person corrupted by personal ambition and influenced by his upbringing and made worse by his constant use of heavy drugs?Thousands of people chose to trust him this book attempts to answer the question that follows : WHY?

Julie says

The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and the People's Temple by Jeff Guinn is a 2017 Simon & Schuster publication.

Thoroughly chilling...

While I was only in my early teens in 1978, I still recall the news footage of the "Jonestown Massacre". I understood on some level what had happened, but I couldn't fully digest it. I tried not to watch the news reports and steered clear of conversations about it because it made me extremely uncomfortable. It was too much for me to cope with, and in all honesty, I still can't wrap my head around it.

Part of me wanted to read this book, in hopes of garnering some understanding of how something like this happened. But, another part of me didn't want to relive that horrible piece of history where over nine hundred people lost their lives.

But, the outstanding reviews convinced me to read it and while I still find these events quite upsetting, I am glad I read the book.

To say this was a comprehensive account of Jim Jones' life is an understatement of epic proportions. This book is an exacting, well researched, serious and non-biased, look at one of the most monstrous cult leaders of all time.

We all know how this will end. The question is- How did it begin?

I won't make this into a book report, if I can help it, but I did want to touch on some of the impressions I was left with.

One of the weirdest things about all this, is that it didn't start out as being all that different from many fundamentalist church doctrines or beliefs. Jim's wife was zealously religious and the couple did present themselves as believing in God and practiced the core Christian values most of us are familiar with. It is easy to see how Jim ingratiated himself into the ministry profession, and why he experienced praise for his genuine service and help to those in need. He was particularly sensitive to the black community and freely welcomed them and worshipped alongside them in a time when such actions raised eyebrows.

However, he quickly shucked off any semblance of being a true believer and began working the tent revival circuit, faked healings, and performed 'miracles' including raising people from the dead. But, there was an audience for that sort of thing, especially in that era of time, and he was hardly the only one out there

working that particular con.

But, religion and doing good deeds were not the cult's only draw. I was amazed at how political it was. Jones was an ardent socialist, and I think many people joined his 'church' because these ideals, without embracing any 'religious' worship of God.

This book took me on stunning and harrowing journey, step by horrifying step, as he morphed into an actual cult leader and managed to mesmerize his followers into doing anything he wanted them to.

I won't go into the details because I want you to see for yourself how vile, narcissistic, cruel, contradictory, and sick he really was. It is an incredible profile of a man who conned, swayed, manipulated, lied, and corrupted so many people, yet managed to amass wealth, while rubbing elbows with celebrities, and politicians, who often praised him for his good deeds!!

As the book progresses, we see how as his psychosis deepened, and as his power increased so did his ego, and his darker tendencies completely took over, fueled by his paranoia need for control and by his use of drugs. So, the closer I came to the climactic events in "Jonestown", I began to dread having to read it in such graphic details.

The phrase, 'don't drink the Koolaid' (it wasn't really the trademarked "Koolaid", but 'Flavor-aid- a cheaper, generic brand), is a familiar one, used to insult anyone exhibiting a certain level of gullibility, and became a common pop culture saying.

"The Jonestown deaths quickly became renowned not as grandly defiant revolutionary gesture, but that ultimate example of human gullibility"

Cults didn't go away after the Jonestown massacre. There were still headline grabbing standoffs and more mass suicides, although nothing that ever came close to topping Jonestown. But, it SEEMED that maybe with a more enlightened, educated, progressive majority in America, these charismatic charlatans may have finally lost their appeal or ability to lure mass followings, as we began to hear less and less about religious cults.

"Demagogues recruit by uniting a disenchanted element against an enemy, then promising to use religion or politics or a combination of the two to bring about rightful change."

While I swore to myself I would not go here, I could not help but notice parallels between Jim Jones' personality traits, such as his inability to delegate or share or his penchant to lash out, deflect, punish, seek restitution, and refuse any hint of apology or compromise, but still managed to lure in folks, knowing just what they needed and wanted to hear, thus securing an almost unshakable loyalty, are traits that are noticeably prevalent in other prominent 'leaders' who have come into power. The resemblance was so eerily uncanny at times I still get chills down my spine thinking about it.

"The less he was recognized and appreciated by the outside world, the grander he proclaimed himself to the followers remaining to him.'

One of the most gruesome pictures included in this book is a photo depicting many of the deceased lying face down in what looked like a grass hut pavilion with a sign hanging on the wall, directly above Jones'

personal chair, that stated:

Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

Even though I did remember the events that took place in Guyana in 1978, I never sought to learn more about Jim Jones than was necessary. So, most of what was detailed here I was largely unaware of. I have to tell you, it's pretty shocking. Jim Jones is one of the strangest people I've ever read about! He was crazy, but smart, did kind and compassionate things for people in need, was incredible charismatic, but could turn on someone in an instant, meting out horrific punishments, both physical and psychological. He could switch from mean to incredibly nice in an instant. He was delusional, believing himself to be God, and expected unquestionable loyalty from his followers, and he usually got it. But it started to unravel and disillusionment did start to set in, with some questioning his decisions or outright refusing to obey. Yet, as we all know, many remained enthralled right up to the bitter end.

I can't praise the author enough for the clear, concise layout used here. The book is organized, well-constructed, is presented chronologically, and reads like a true crime novel in many ways. I was riveted, glued to the pages, still unable to grapple with the reality of Jones' life and the path he ultimately took to Guyana.

There may always be a part of my heart and mind that can't accept that over 900 people drank cyanide laced punch at his behest, including children. This book, though, left me with no place to hide, forcing me to accept these events as a gruesome, hideous, and incredibly tragic part of America's history.

My fervent hope is that history never repeats itself.

5 stars

Myrna says

Won this book in a Goodreads giveaway. After I received it, I met the author at the San Antonio Book Festival and got my book signed!!!!

In *The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and the People's Temple*, the author does a good job describing Jim Jones and the events that lead up to the suicide-murder through extensive research and interviews. I remember hearing about it on the car radio (when I was a youngen) yet not truly understanding the horrendous act until many years later. If you want to learn new details as I did or want know the story behind Jones and Jonestown, this is the book to read.

Joseph says

An Audible.com purchase.

I am old enough to remember the news accounts of Jonestown back in 1978 and the self-inflicted for the most part) deaths of 918 people -- children to seniors. I often wondered what would drive people to such fanatical support of a leader that they would be willing to die for a cause that did not merit it. It was not Mesada. There was no invasion. For the most part, Jones brought it down on himself and through a very paranoid but methodical brain ended the lives of his followers. People who followed him across the country and to another continent.

Jones is a complicated person. He fought for civil rights. Actively encouraged the integration of African-Americans into his church. He stood up to creditors. He volunteered his followers to help where needed. He staged peaceful protests over Jim Crow laws. He won the respect of many local and state leaders. He was a man with a mission. The mission becomes the blurry part of Jones. Was he fully behind his Christian socialism or was it merely a means for him to gain power over others. Whatever his original motives he slid into drugs and corruption.

The Road to Jonestown chronicles the life of Jim Jones from before his birth to the aftermath of Jonestown. It is an incredible story mixing the most basic tenant of socialism and Christianity -- care for your fellow man, helping the poor, equality. All these Jones and his Peoples Temple accomplished and diligently worked for. Even the Church's name Peoples Temple did not have an apostrophe after the "s". It was a temple for all people, not a temple owned by people. There was no clear snap in Jones behavior. It changed gradually and was not noticed or that those who did notice though the good of their work was great than Jones' deception. One may wonder how a person could have so much control over lives of others and how people would happily give up everything for a single person or organization. This book explains in great detail the life of Jones and the history of the Peoples Temple yet will still leave the reader wondering how it all happened. The facts are all present in the book, but the results still leave questions in rational minds.

Char says

What a sad, sad, story. Even while I was listening, I was hoping for a different ending.

Jeff Guinn is an excellent author of true crime. He is somehow able to relate the facts of the story without passing judgement. In this case, I learned a lot. The Peoples Church, (no apostrophe!), did a lot of work in the area of desegregation. Jim Jones and his wife even adopted a black child. In fact, they did a lot of good works together, for the elderly and for the members of their church.

But as so often happens, absolute power corrupts and all that. Jim ran his church with an iron fist. He slept with many partners and somehow made it so that it was okay within his church. He began to do drugs-a lot of drugs. There was corporal punishment for those who did not follow the rules. He began to become paranoid and unbearable to be around, at times.

Follow this to the end that we all knew was coming. I didn't realize how many people were involved in this mass suicide/mass murder, but I know now it was over 900. I say mass murder because children, (children!), were killed by having a syringe full of poisoned flavor-aide shot down their throats. It's one thing when your twisted beliefs cause you to kill yourself, it's another thing entirely to kill infants and children. It's just such a waste of life.

Despite my attempts, I will never understand this mentality. I'm fascinated with it, I admit, but I can't understand it. Perhaps, it's just not understandable? It's certainly not sane.

If you want to learn more about the Peoples Church and Jim Jones, then I highly recommend this book. I listened to it on audio, narrated by George Newbern and he was excellent.

I downloaded this audio-book from my library for free. Libraries RULE!

LeAnne says

Let me toss out a hypothetical here. Let's say the US has been embroiled in an unpopular overseas war for some time. At home, the urban poor are having trouble finding decent wages. Politicians are in constant badgering disagreement. Police brutality toward people of color is troublesome. There are major concerns about Russia's intentions toward our country.

A young minister is down at his heels financially, but because he believes firmly in racial equality, he and his wife adopt children of different ethnicity. He starts doing inner city outreach in his ministry, but instead of preaching patience and looking toward rewards in the afterlife, this bright charismatic fellow says that believers should not wait on heaven - that they should empower themselves to move up and to also help their fellow man. His sermons are slightly less about belief than they are about social mores - getting healthcare to all. Seeing that the elderly are well cared for. That kind of thing.

Believe it or not, Jim Jones the cult leader was this man when he first started out in the early 60s. While the people who attended his church meetings were merely good hearted, except for a handful of close followers, none of them realized he was talking about socialism. He moved his church out west and started attracting more of the liberally minded social activists.

White kids from California who had probably never sat down next to a person of color before nor had ever gone hungry were drawn to his integrated church meetings. Collection plates were passed just as they are in all churches, but the funds went directly to purchasing food or medicine for downtrodden inner city residents.

These affluent kids started proudly working all hours of the day to benefit their fellow man, and with their help, the temple was able to put poor kids through community college. Well educated church members, many social workers themselves, started doing the paperwork to get poor families signed up on welfare, feeding anybody who is hungry, repairing the sewer lines of people who could not afford to pay a plumber. The Temple hired many who could not find work, giving them dignity.

Old folks were being nicely taken care of in houses that Jones purchased while his Peoples Temple was paid by Medicare and Social Security. Drug addicts were helped to dry out and later given jobs. Black and white single people without families moved close to the church in homes purchased by Peoples Temple, sleeping several to a room. There was no place here for cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs. Everybody was equal. Nobody went hungry. Everybody worked for the good of all. Jim Jones wore the same few sets of hand-me-down clothes that others did. His wife drove the ancient stationwagon inherited from her parents just to drive their kids around.

Basically, if you know anybody who has gone on one of those mission trips somewhere so that A) they can help others who are in need but B) they end up feeling AWESOME about themselves for being a do-gooder, then BINGO! That is precisely what Jim Jones was selling. If you've ever wanted to help your fellow man, then you ought to not scoff at the people who ended up in his cult. Granted, one should

disentangle oneself when things get weird, but herd mentality has led people to do worse.

Yes, I do believe he was mentally ill in some sort of way - maybe narcissistic personality disorder or sociopathy? - but he didn't initially come across that way.

I'm not saying he was a sweetheart. His immense popularity had little stabs of the despicable at the outset - one way he initially raised money was at tent revivals where he would eavesdrop on crowd conversations before the show, then "read minds" while he was up there preaching. He would heal people (plants of his) in the audience of cancer by laying on hands and then having them taken to a rest room where they would "pass" the illness. They'd come out of the john holding a big ball of nasty gunk in their handkerchiefs and pass it off as a cancerous tumor (it was days' old chicken guts).

The rest of the mesmerizing story in this book is what you might expect. His megalomania grew as his popularity did. Needing more funds to do good works, he got people to sign over their clothes and cars so that they could be sold. When his wife had severe back problems that made marital relations impossible, God conveniently told him to get jiggy with a young woman from the church. Jim NEEDED the release of sex in order to focus, so his wife just had to understand. And she did. The money and sex and power escalated. He became addicted to drugs and started to think of himself as not just godly, but God.

Jones had always been fixated on the Cold War and came across a magazine article which listed the spots on earth which might be spared nuclear fallout should nukes start raining down. He had chosen to move his church to a spot in California which was deemed safe, but he wanted a larger spot in central America to truly keep his people from being nuked. This is how he ended up moving his cult south.

The details of his spiraling madness are only jaw dropping because of the well educated, bright do-gooders who continued down that path with him. Some were murdered, but many willingly died. They didn't snap from sane, logical types to slathering cult devotees in one fell swoop - they were drawn in slowly, the proverbial frog in the pot of warming water.

My takeaway here is to really look carefully at civic leaders or men of religion or politicians. People like Jim Jones had something good to sell during a time period when people were emotionally in the market. Hitler surely started out in a similar vein, peddling dignity back to a country that had been economically decimated by war. I believe that most people are good at heart and dream of positive things for this world - we just need to be careful from whom we decide to buy those dreams.

abby says

This book is mostly composed of what I can only describe as administrative details of Jim Jones's People Temple. Pages and pages and pages of unimportant, forgettable detail. The move to Jonestown, where 900 Americans would meet their tragic end in the Guyanese jungle at the orders of their cult leader, doesn't even happen until 350 pages into the book. The murder/suicide itself gets crammed into about 3 paragraphs. I don't understand why this author chose to prioritize the irrelevant and gloss over the significant. I would not recommend this. I gave this book 2 stars-- the third star is for me for slogging through this (my husband got me this as a Christmas present, so I was more or less contractually obligated).

Ellen Gail says

I finished a book! Now I'm only 18 books behind schedule.

Anyway this was good and I will try to write a review for it. I promise. Once I get completely settled and into a routine at work I will hopefully be back to being a reading machine.

Diane Barnes says

This book was unsettling, to say the least. I'm old enough to remember the mass suicide of the religious cult in the jungle, and this book gives all the details, from Jones birth in Indiana, to his rise as a minister, and finally, his belief that he was a God and savior himself. How anyone in their right mind could follow this man, sign all their property over to him, and in a lot of cases, even their children, allow him to direct every aspect of their lives and give him total control; it's all just beyond my understanding.

"Demagogues recruit by uniting a disenchanted element against an enemy, then promising to use religion or politics or a combination of the two to bring about rightful change. Those as gifted as Jim Jones use actual rather than imagined injustices as their initial lure--the racism and economic disparity in America that Jones cited were, and still are, real--then exaggerate the threat until followers lose any sense of perspective."

"The Jonestown deaths quickly became renowned not as a grandly defiant revolutionary gesture, but as the ultimate example of human gullibility. "

The book was worth reading just for those two statements alone.

Valerity (Val) says

THE ROAD TO JONESTOWN By Jeff Guinn

Having read many of the available books about Jonestown throughout the years since it happened, I didn't think that there was a whole lot more to be said on the subject. But I also figured that since it's been a number of years since I've done the reading, that this book would be a great refresher on the topic. Well, it was that, but also a heck of a lot more. Guinn's book is a skilled, in-depth look at James Warren Jones, from his birth on May 13, 1931 and lonely childhood, to his death surrounded by his hundreds of followers in Jonestown, Guyana on November 18, 1978 when he was 47 years old. I found that there was just so much more to discover about him, and his wife Marceline and how the Peoples Temple came about. and grew

The book explains Jones' need to control his followers in as many ways as he was able to, and how he used his control to rake over their whole lives until they lived just for him, calling him "Father". I found that there were far more good things about his group and what they did in the name of socialism, than I had realized before. But that there was also much more nefarious and dark about other things that went on at Jones' direction too, right up to the final order for them all to die. I would recommend this book for anyone interested in this cult group in the hopes that it may be learned from, and never repeated.

Esil says

The Road to Jonestown was fascinating -- and depressing. I listened to the audio. The author, Jeff Guinn, did a great job of tracing Jim Jones' history and the events leading up to the mass suicide in Jonestown. It's a good study of the making of a narcissistic paranoid megalomaniac. It's still hard for me to understand how Jones attracted and kept his many followers, but I feel that I get it a bit more. Jones had a great need for approval and adulation, and he seemed to be able to zero in on people who were vulnerable -- whether psychologically or materially. While Jones' relationship with his followers was ripe for many abuses -- including his ultimate abuse at the end -- it is clear that many people were drawn to Jones' message that he was their true protector against a world intent on hurting them. Guinn also manages to be fair in his portrayal, showing how Jones started off with decent ideas about racial and economic equality, but how his insatiable appetite for adulation and power combined with his paranoia overtook anything good in The People's Temple. It may be hard for some to read given that we all know what happens at the end, but I certainly found it worth the time. While the outcome in Jonestown is off the charts, this is not a unique example of people blindly following a demented leader. It's worth trying to understand how that can happen.

For those who like audiobooks, it's worth noting that the audio version is also well read.
