

Cambridge Elements

Elements in New Religious Movements

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PEOPLES TEMPLE AND JONESTOWN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Peoples Temple and Jonestown in the Twenty-First Century

Elements in New Religious Movements

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Abstract: The new religious movement of Peoples Temple, begun in the 1950s, came to a dramatic end with the mass murders and suicides that occurred in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978. This analysis presents the historical context for understanding the Temple by focusing on the ways that migrations from Indiana to California and finally to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana shaped the life and thought of Temple members. It closely examines the religious beliefs, political philosophies, and economic commitments held by the group, and it shifts the traditional focus on the leader and founder, Jim Jones, to the individuals who made up the heart and soul of the movement. It also investigates the paradoxical role that race and racism played throughout the life of the Temple. The Element concludes by considering the ways in which Peoples Temple and the tragedy at Jonestown have entered the popular imagination and captured international attention.

Keywords: new religious movements, Peoples Temple, Jonestown, religion and violence, brainwashing, cults, anticult movement

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