‘I’m Going to Shake the Whole Nation:’ Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and the Indianapolis Human Rights Commission

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If the name Jim Jones sounds familiar, it probably conjures images of a tropical hellscape, a maniacal madman and his cult of lost souls deep in the South American jungle. The roots of the Jonestown tragedy, however, were not planted in Guyana, nor in California, but in Indianapolis, Indiana. Literature depicting Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple commonly seeks to distance Jim Jones from his Indiana roots, glossing over his early life and diving straight into the macabre events that occurred in the Guyanese jungle in 1978. However, Jim Jones's beliefs were not separate from Indiana's popular racial attitudes, they personified Indiana's struggle to place itself in the midst of a burgeoning civil rights movement. How well does Jim Jones and the philosophy of the early Peoples Temple fit into the context of racial justice and civil rights in Indiana? How did such a radical outlier become a public official in moderate Indianapolis? What were the ramifications of that for the city of Indianapolis, and how did Jim Jones use the city as a backboard to jumpstart his public career? Indiana was the birthplace of not only Jones, but of the Peoples Temple too; it is essential to understand the roots of the Peoples Temple's political, religious, and social agendas, which ultimately led to one of the most shocking tragedies in modern history. Examining Jim Jones's Hoosier roots, therefore, is crucial, not just in understanding the mind of Jones, but in fortifying and expanding the scope of analysis of both the Peoples Temple and the city of Indianapolis during a period of time which is broadly ignored in the history of both institutions.

Before he was Jim Jones, he was Jimmy. In 1931, Jimmy Jones was born in the small town of Lynn, Indiana. Jones himself described Lynn as "just a little Hoosier town on the Ohio

River," yet that small Hoosier town brought Jones "a great deal of pain."[1] In *The Road to Jonestown*, author Jeff Guinn states that "Lynn was a friendly place."[2] Despite his friendly neighbors, Jones grew up with a mother, Lynetta, who had a penchant for social isolation, and a father, James, who was a disabled World War I veteran, leaving Jones in dire straits when it came to social interaction in his formative years. Jones's first experiences with racism were through his father, whom Jones later described as a "macho-type racist," an archetype he vehemently asserted he tried to "rebel against."[3] Jones also claimed he was "undoubtedly one of the poorer in the community;" however, Guinn describes the Jones' residence on Grant Street in Lynn as "neither distinguished nor dilapidated," with a garage and a car that had been a hand-me-down from a relative, which was fairly average for the time.[4] The earliest years of Jones's life are shrouded in contradictions, with Jones's self-created mythos often far surpassing reports from friends and family in creativity.

Jones was an eccentric child; he frequently stole food from stores around town, which shopkeepers allowed because his mother paid off her son's debt each Saturday.[5] When Jones came of school age, he started spending his days wandering the streets of Lynn aimlessly, alone and looking quite lost.[6] During these solitary walks, he became friends with his elderly neighbor Myrtle Kennedy, who took him to her Nazarene church. Jones and Kennedy grew close; Jones began to spend the night at the Kennedy residence frequently, and even began calling Myrtle "mom" in private.[7] One childhood friend, Max Knight, recalled that "Jimmy was so obviously needy," perhaps because of his poor home life, with his bickering parents and "a mean father who scared him."[8]

When Jones was 10, the U.S. entered World War II. In his own recollections, Jones recounts that he “identified strongly with the Soviets” and “used to play as if [he] were a Russian soldier . . . driving Nazis back.”[9] However, Guinn writes that Jones was “fascinated with Nazis,” describing how Jones “studied Adolf Hitler intently” and tried to convince the neighborhood kids to play as Nazi soldiers with him, ultimately commanding kids who were “young enough for Jim to bully into playing whatever roles he wanted.”[10] This interesting contradiction from Jones’s childhood is evident of the revisions Jones made to his own origin story later in life. Jones could have seen this revision as a way to make him appear wise even as a child; since he ultimately wanted to implement a communist system, appearing to have sided with the Soviets since his childhood would have given him the claim that he had known the importance of communism even as a child of just ten years old.

As Jones entered high school, he remained an outsider among his peers, though he managed to capture their attention with riveting conversations, “religion and sex being his main two topics.”[11] He stood out because he “wore Sunday clothes almost every day” compared to the casual dress of his peers.[12] He began traveling on the weekends to Richmond, Indiana, which had a considerably larger black population than Lynn, where he preached sermons “about everyone being equal in God’s eyes, how it was wrong to look down on anybody, especially for the color of their skin.”[13] Jones showed, even in his early evangelizing, an acute knowledge of social nuances and struggles; though Jones was not the most popular student, he learned how to entice his classmates with the taboo. And though he grew up with a racist father in the shadow of the Ku Klux Klan, he demonstrated an awareness of and empathy for racial issues. Both of these factors would later serve to be crucial in establishing Jones's personality both as a local activist and as a minister.

After Jones' junior year of high school, he and his mother moved to Richmond, Indiana. In Richmond, Jones gained a few friends who invited him to join the Christian Youth Fellowship, where they debated the Bible and came to the conclusion of "Christian communism," an approach that encouraged churches "to voluntarily adopt a philosophy that mandated compassion and equal treatment for all."[14] Jones's passion for racial equality intermingled with his desire for "Christian communism," and he felt called to follow a career in ministry. In 1948, as Jones worked quickly through the academic curriculum at his Richmond high school, he got a job at Reid Memorial Hospital as a night orderly.[15] While working there, he met Marceline Baldwin, a charming young nurse whom he married in the summer of 1949.

In the fall of that year, the pair lived together in Bloomington, Indiana, where Jim attended school at Indiana University. In Jones's second year of college, he and Marceline moved to Indianapolis for Jim to study pre-law at Indiana University's campus in the city.[16] He showed less academic vigor than he had earlier in life, earning average grades and talking about studying law, but his real interest still lay in his "renewed commitment to socialism" and his increasing fascination with Marxism.[17] Jones eventually enrolled in night classes at Butler University, graduating with a degree in secondary education in 1961, over ten years later, though the details of his enrollment remain obscure.[18] In June of 1950, Marceline's nine-year-old cousin Ronnie, who had been shuffled from home to home in foster care, captured Jim's interest. Marceline and Jim invited the boy to come live with the pair in the city. During the youngster's stay at the Jones's residence, he was exposed to lectures from Jim about sex and about Ronnie's mother, whom Jim called a whore.[19] Tellingly, Ronnie later recalled that “Jim was two-faced, all friendly and nice when he was out in public, and much different at home.”[20] Even in the early ‘50s, before Jones had established any name for himself, he displayed a certain duality about him, one part empathetic, progressive, and kind, the other volatile, paranoid, and cruel. Jones criticized Indianapolis, which at the time housed the national headquarters for the Ku Klux Klan, describing the city as “besieged by redneck mentality from the South.”[21]

Jones’s claims were not unfounded. African Americans and white Southerners alike moved to Indiana in search of job opportunities, many of which were industrial positions, at the beginning of World War II. The influx of migrants, both foreign and domestic, paired with uprooted Southerners and tight-lipped moderate Hoosiers, could have created an incredibly hostile environment. In some ways, it did. Many Hoosiers during the era between the end of the war and the peak of the civil rights movement prided themselves on their neutrality; they turned up their noses to their Southern neighbors and their blatant brutality towards minorities. In James H. Madison’s *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, he writes that even in the activities of the Ku Klux Klan “[t]here is not a single documented lynching in Indiana. Nor is there a known Klan murder of any sort. Violence was not the Klan way.”[22] This less violent form of racism was prominent in the northern states; the more vicious the southern states became, the more Midwesterners prided themselves on their hospitality despite their own prejudices. When the Klan fell from grace in Indiana in the 1920s, it fell because of political blunders, not because of changes of heart on the part of its members.

By the time Jim Jones and his wife moved to Indianapolis in 1950, the city had passed policies which eliminated *de jure* segregation, but Indianapolians still experienced *de facto* segregation through political moves which were presented as progressive. For example, the 1949 School Desegregation Law promised the integration of Indiana's public schools, yet an *Indianapolis Recorder* article from 1965 contended that "[a]t the time of this writing de facto segregation of Negro pupils is statewide and the discriminations against licensed and unlicensed employees and would-be employees of all the school corporations in Indiana is a demonstrable fact."[23] Though many white Hoosiers were content with that system, black Hoosiers sought to use their influence in a number of ways leading up to the civil rights movement. Throughout the 1940s and '50s, African Americans in Indianapolis made waves through their political alignment, playing a major role in the realignment of the Democratic Party in Indiana.[24]

Indianapolis served as the center of black activism in Indiana. In *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*, scholar Emma Thornbrough writes that even "the Klan issue failed to arouse an equally strong response of black voters in communities outside of Indianapolis" throughout the 1920s and '30s, a trend that continued into Jones's era.[25] The postwar years led to a surge in the black population throughout the state, with Indianapolis, already 15% black before the war, increased to a 24% black population by 1965.[26] In the early 1950s, as Jones began his attempts to start his own church in the city, he used his existing followers to attract new ones through the issue of integration. It was apparently at this point, in the midst of his college years, when he conjured up his grand plan: "I decided, how can I demonstrate my Marxism? The thought was, infiltrate the church."[27] In retrospect, Jones did exactly that. He went on through the next decade to form what was almost a business model for how to gain devoted followers through the revival scene, reeling in unsuspecting guests through faith healings and working in mildly communistic rhetoric in his sermons. Integration was a central tenet of this rhetoric. A December 1956 article from the *Indianapolis Recorder* summed up Jones's contribution to the community as such: "The story seems to indicate that a pastor who fearlessly preaches the gospel of Christ on race relations may find himself in trouble with church authorities— but he will be rewarded with an inspiring response from the hearts of the people."[28]

Before the Peoples Temple acquired its own building, Jones performed as a guest minister in churches throughout Indianapolis, insisting on integrated services and often taking many of the original church's members with him when he left. Indiana's system of *de facto* segregation made this possible. In the deeply volatile South, figures like Jones were often beaten or even lynched simply for associating with blacks. In the North, however, there existed a veil of progress in which white Northerners, content with themselves for being better than their Southern counterparts, absolved themselves from the issue of racism entirely. Thornbrough notes that Republican political campaigns in the postwar years played off this trope, warning against "the power of southern racists in the Democratic Party," and "called upon blacks to vote Republican to diminish the influence of southern whites."[29] Racism, therefore, was something that came from away, and the influx of migrants, who had experienced such vitriol firsthand, feared such rhetoric.

Jones targeted members who he thought were sympathetic enough to the cause to follow him, and uneducated enough to do blindly. Those attracted to him were those who had a stake in his cause. One example is Catherine Thrash, an Indianapolian Jonestown survivor who followed Jones for the majority of his career. Thrash recalled that she lived and worked near Crown Hill Cemetery on the northside of Indianapolis.[30] This area is part of the Butler-Tarkington neighborhood, which, in 1956, formed "the Butler-Tarkington Neighborhood Association

(BTNA) [which] strove to 'achieve an ideal racially integrated, beautiful neighborhood in that part of Indianapolis north of 38th Street, west of Meridian Street, south of 56th Street, and east of Route 421 and the Water Company Canal, whichever is the farthest east.'"[31] Even this model was flawed, however, as blacks "were sequestered in the southern portion of the neighborhood," still distinctly segregated even with its progressive community organization.[32] If it were possible to analyze the addresses of Jones's entire Indianapolis congregation, it is fair to assume that the trend would be largely similar to Thrash's scenario: Indianapolis residents with a low to average education and income, aware of Indianapolis's flawed racial policies because they lived in their midst, though powerless to change it without the aid of prominent white leaders.

Jones's model worked expertly in Indianapolis; though black members were attracted through door-to-door activism and community outreach, white members were coaxed into the church through much less aggressive means. They were lured in, enchanted by Jones's mystical healing abilities (which in reality sprouted from the eavesdropped conversations Jones and his congregants were able to overhear in the crowd), and from there were slowly indoctrinated. White members did not have to be radical to join; they simply had to be tolerant, and that was exactly the mindset many moderate Hoosiers adopted. Former member Jack Beam sums it up succinctly: "Lotta [sic] people had this problem: they wanted the healings, but they were tore up on the race issue," on which Jones refused to relent.[33] He initially fit into Indiana's traditional model of racial activism, one in which both white and black people could serve as figures of authority, with "[w]hites as well as African Americans serv[ing] on NAACP boards" and uncontroversial candidates for public offices.[34]

The viewpoint of the "neutral" white in Indianapolis during the late 1950s to early 1960s can best be summarized through an op-ed written by Indianapolian George Rose for a September 1960 issue of *The Indianapolis News*. In reaction to Mayor Charles Boswell's announcement of his search for a director for his new Human Rights Commission, Rose questioned the necessity of such a council at all. He writes, "There is also the question as to whether, even in our far from perfect community, there are sufficient problems to justify such an expenditure."[35] The expenditure in question— a $7,000 annual salary for the director of the commission— would later belong to none other than Jim Jones himself. However, the Commission struggled to get off the ground, and its formation was a nearly two year endeavor before Jones became its head.

The Indianapolis Human Rights Commission had been in search of a director since ideas for the group started cropping up around 1959. In February of 1961, an article from *The Indianapolis News* announced that "James W. Jones, 29, pastor of the People's [sic] Christian Church at 975 N. Delaware, today [February 21, 1961] was made director of the Indianapolis Human Rights Commission."[36] Jones was by no means the favored choice of the Mayor to fill the role; notably, in the *News*'s February 17th announcement of Boswell's recommendation of Jones for the position, Mayor Boswell reportedly assured the public that "the appointment to the $7,000-a-year post is not permanent because it is expected that Frank Reeve, former executive of Flanner House Homes, Inc., will take the position when he returns this summer from a post with the Friends Church in Africa."[37] The article also includes a telling revelation: the position had been vacant for nearly two years before Jones was finally selected to fill it. "Alex J. Kertis, personnel director for the city, had been doing the work as well as his own with no extra pay," in the meantime.[38]

Jones's tenure as director of the Commission was short lived, lasting only ten months, but those months were turbulent, both for the Commission and for Jones. Certainly by 1961, perhaps even by 1959, Jones had established himself as a controversial figure within the city of Indianapolis. Guinn writes that,"White leaders continued agreeing to meet whenever black ministers asked, and afterward nothing changed— except when Jim Jones was involved."[39] Additionally, he and Marceline had started their "rainbow family," consisting of two adopted Asian children and one biological white child, whom they frequently took on outings. Most shockingly, Guinn notes that in 1961, though whether this occurred before or after Jones took on the position is unclear, Jones and his wife "defied Indiana tradition and adopted a black infant."[40] In fact, author Leigh Fondakowski writes that the two were the first white couple in Indiana to do so.[41]

Jones defied the unspoken bounds of his position, and thus, the unspoken attitude towards racial policy in Indianapolis and in Indiana as a whole. The position "was essentially honorary. A director wasn't expected to do much besides preside over occasional meetings where much was discussed and nothing done."[42] Using the manpower of his congregation and the influence he had acquired, Jones immediately began a struggle to enact change within the city. Jones started his crusade through dinners with African-American friends at "mom-and-pop companies," local businesses with whom Jones could work his charm and moderate influence.[43] His approach was shrewd; businesses that complied with Jones's request for integration were rewarded "with lots of new customers, most of them Temple members...usually arriving at off-hours rather than busy ones, providing the restaurants with additional traffic without inconveniencing or driving away their regulars."[44] On top of that, "whenever a mom-and-pop restaurant integrated at Jones's request, Peoples Temple would distribute flyers announcing the latest progress in integrating Indianapolis."[45] It is integral to note that Jones's tactic was quintessentially Hoosier in nature. Indianapolis had experienced sit-ins by the early 1940s, with a 1946 citywide sit-in, as well as an "eating crusade" led by a multiracial Civil Rights Committee (with no affiliation to the later Human Rights Commission).[46] Jones utilized the Hoosier identity and its unique form of moderate activism in order to distinguish himself as a doer, someone who played off Hoosier motifs and re-energized them to match the fervor of the new Civil Rights movement.

As far as a resume went, Jones's by that time had become quite impressive, at least in the scope of local politics. Jones had gathered a robust following within the revival circuit of the Midwest, speaking and performing healings across Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.[47] A minister across state lines from Illinois, Ross Case, "was determined to integrate" his church, and deliberately requested Jones's help, highlighting the reach of Jones's influence.[48] As a minister, Jones had made a name for himself, and the reputation that preceded him was one directly tied to racial equality and integration. Jones, though not politically savvy enough to enact legislative change, had mastered the art of political theater, and he utilized his congregation to create his image as a local liberator. In her memoir, Catherine Thrash recalls:

> Jim took [my sisters] Zip, Mildred, and me to Human Rights Commission meetings when he was appointed the first full-time director… Some in the church put out that he took us 'cause we were well-dressed and acted intelligent. He didn't take many blacks. A lot of whites didn't like what he was doing in the city, stirring things up. They called him a trouble maker.[49]

And perhaps he was. Guinn reports that Jones's goals were zealous. "His goal was the integration of blacks into every aspect of Indianapolis, and he firmly espoused socialist policies that, to most of the politically conservative white people he had to convince, were the same thing as communism."[50] There was tension from the beginning; in April, only two months in, Jones wrote a journal article detailing the "activities of his department, including the race problems he faced and how he has handled them."[51] Though the *News* describes the article as merely a report, it apparently contained content inflammatory enough to demand that Jones submit future newsletters "to the Commission and Mayor Boswell for approval."[52] It is also telling that the language used by the paper and, presumably, by Jones in his article, is singular, not plural. It was not the work the Commission had done, but the work Jones alone had done, the sole redeemer of Indianapolis.

Resistance to Jones's appointment to the position initially began less as an attack on Jones personally and more as a dismissal of the Human Rights Commission as a whole. The aforementioned letter by George Rose serves not only as a reference to the mindset of the average Hoosier in regards to direct action regarding civil rights, but also shows that the Commission faced opposition before it had even formed. Jones reflected to the *Indianapolis Recorder* later that "[w]hen he accepted the position as Commission head in 1960 for three solid months segregationists tossed rocks at his home, called the phone demanding: 'Nigger lover get out of town,' threw explosives in his yard, and some racists even went so far as to write anti-Negro sentiments to prominent civil rights workers and attributed them to Rev. Jones by signing his name."[53] It is extremely important to note that there is no documentation available which verifies Jones's accusations or even mentions their existence outside of articles that cite Jones's own account. Despite this, it is not farfetched to admit that Jones likely did face at least a mild degree of backlash from locals if the George Rose piece is to be accepted as an indicator of most white Indianapolians' philosophy, even if Jones's stories were highly exaggerated.

How Jones managed to acquire enough political clout to mingle with Mayor Boswell remains a mystery. A strong theory is that it was simply due to the rapid growth of the Peoples Temple within Indianapolis. Jones was masterful in weaponizing his followers, and the early years of the Peoples Temple were spent in direct action throughout the city through the use of the congregation. The congregation established a free restaurant that offered services to Indianapolis's poor and reportedly "knocked on 10,000 doors" in pursuit of new members, according to Marceline Jones.[54] Jones's activism during his time with the Commission was only possible because of the power of the congregation Jones brought with him. The Commission listed several other ministers as members throughout various points in its history as well, making Jones appear to be a solid, even if abrasive, choice for the job. Paired with the rapid pace at which he was attracting followers through the revival circuit, Jones was on course to become a local celebrity.

Whether or not those outside Jones's sphere of influence knew of his radical socialist opinions during the early years of the Peoples Temple can be debated. Though the Temple freely advertised that it assisted people of all races, Jones himself noted that he initially played his cards close to his chest, remarking, "The early years, I'd approached Christendom from a communalist standpoint, with only intermittent mention of my um, Marxist views."[55] In fact, Chidester reports that "a long-standing follower who attended those early sermons, for example, said he was not aware until 1968 that socialism was the goal of the Peoples Temple."[56] Jones picked Christianity because he could start with relatively tame ideas from the Bible, such as the concept of loving one's neighbor, and radicalize it over time until his followers had fully embraced his idea of a communist utopia.

His followers were by no means oblivious, though. Joining the Temple was in and of itself a political act. For whites it symbolized, if not progressiveness, then at the very least tolerance. And for blacks, the "perceived status value of holding at least nominal membership in white congregations" was attractive in a state where outwardly political actions were frowned upon.[57] The mere existence of Jones's interracial congregation was a provocation, and even the most destitute and uneducated of Jones's followers would have had to be, at least to some degree, cognizant of race relations within the city simply by living their daily lives. Jones utilized this to establish his congregation, and it appeared that he was also on track to employ this method to begin a political career within Indianapolis and perhaps even within the state.

Jones tried to use the Human Rights Commission to further his reputation and his career, and the absurdity and randomness of the events that followed leave only one question: what changed Jones's path? Jones was poised to hold a comfortably esteemed position within the city as an influential minister and may have even successfully been able to establish a local political career given the trajectory of his career as director on the Human Rights Commission. The problem was twofold: firstly, Jones received pushback from members of the community, both regular citizens and other influential officials. However, even if Jones had eventually been let go from the Commission, whether that be due to the return to the United States of Frank Reeve or due to turmoil within the group, he was on course to make a name for himself that superseded the Commission. In *Violence and Religious Commitment: Implications of Jim Jones's Peoples Temple Movement*, author John R. Hall argues that Jones decided not to enter politics because he "seems to have had limitations both as an evangelist and as a politician. He simply did not succeed in fooling key California religious observers with his faked miracles. And for all the political support he peddled in California politics, Jones was not always able to draw on his good political credit when he needed it."[58] Though this is in reference to Jones's time on the West Coast, it is applicable to his time in Indianapolis as well. As his career progressed, Jones would have struggled to forge a political career in any location because his views were so politically volatile and religiously absurd that an alliance with any major politician was unlikely, and Jones lacked the tact and amiability necessary to charm a secular audience.

Secondly, Jones's increasing paranoia marked the beginning of his mental spiral, one that demanded more than ministry could offer. Jones's personal philosophy between 1950, the year he moved to Indianapolis, and 1963, the year he returned from Brazil and convinced his followers to move westward with him, became increasingly globalized. Jones alludes to this global awareness in his musings; he remarks that during his childhood playtime, he always identified "with something other than the American society, because it did not, had not given me a feeling of acceptance."[59] Initially, Jones was content using his congregation to integrate local establishments. But the more power Jones received, the more he desperately desired. Jones's brief time as director for the Civil Rights Commission was essential in the formation of his never ending thirst for power because it made him realize that even if he could change Indianapolis— which he felt was impossible due to both real and imagined opposition— it would not be enough. There was no local adulation, no mayoral clout, no citywide influence that could persuade Jones to stay in Indiana. He needed more.

Jones's psyche was quickly deteriorating. He was becoming increasingly paranoid about the threat of nuclear warfare and, upon reading an article from *Esquire* detailing safe places to hide in the event of nuclear attacks, Jones made plans to flee to Brazil.[60] In December of 1961, *The Indianapolis News* reported that Jones had requested thirty to sixty days leave "for reasons of health," which Mayor Boswell granted.[61] These claims may have had a bit of truth to them; Jones had reportedly been suffering from seizures and even confided in his associate pastor Archie Ijames that he had been experiencing visions and messages from "extraterrestrial beings."[62] The next two years of Jones's life remain unverifiable and virtually untraceable. Most biographies indicate that Jones lived in Brazil during the years 1961 and 1962, though investigative journalist Will Savive references Guyanese newspapers which mention Jones from October 1961, as well as evidence that may indicate Jones spent time in Cuba.[63] All of this information was hidden from the public until Jones returned in 1963; all references to Jones's absence from within Indianapolis point to ill health as the culprit.

Jones's family did not join him until April of 1962, when they flew to Sao Paulo, Brazil.[64] Stephan Jones remembered, "[W]e left for Brazil when I was about three years old. I don't remember much, but I know that Dad got right up into setting up an orphanage for all the children whose parents had just died off."[65] Even though the Joneses were surrounded by poverty, they lived luxuriously; a neighbor, Sebastiaco Carlos Rocha, claimed that the family "enjoyed a very expensive lifestyle" during their stay in one of Rio de Janeiro's finest apartment complexes.[66] Perhaps their lifestyle simply appeared rich to the relatively impoverished people they aided, as Stephan testified that Jim "never would live high no matter what. We always would live in the poorest sections of town because we didn't want to lose our identification."[67]

All of this is to say that there is nothing definitive from this period of Jones's life in terms of evidence. Whatever happened to Jones, wherever he was, he underwent an extreme ideological shift during these years. By the time the Jones family returned, Jim had transformed into a darker version of himself who was insatiable for money and power.

The money for the Brazil venture sprouted from the church, apparently the only people in the nation who knew Jones's whereabouts, even if only vaguely. While the Joneses enjoyed exorbitance, the Peoples Temple experienced a dizzying amount of successive changes. including shuffling through a series of guest ministers and severe financial struggles. In a September 1963 *Indianapolis Star* article, a man named Rev. Edward J. Malmin was listed as the pastor and reported that he was "working without salary until the indebtedness of the church is overcome."[68] Another *Star* article from January of the same year described the difficulties the church faced trying to keep their free restaurant open:

> The budget has been met in many ways: by donations, use of surplus commodities, planned purchases of groceries, contributions from the pastor, the Rev. James Jones, from fees received in his ministerial services in Ohio, and from contributions obtained by the Friends of Peoples Temple.[69]

In Indianapolis, the Commission simply replaced Jones and moved on. By June 30th, 1962, a man named Richard Landrigan had been appointed the new director of the Commission, and *The Indianapolis Star* confirmed that Jones had resigned, one again citing ill health as the reason.[70] Alex J. Kertis had returned to the role in the interim. In the years after Jones departed, the Commission underwent an interesting change. A quick perusal of newspaper archives shows a stark increase in mentions of the Commission after 1965; it began hiring black Commissioners, enacting local programs, and truly dedicating itself to becoming an institution whose value was not solely in its name. This dynamic was not present while Jones was there. This is most likely for several reasons. The first is that the Commission was still in its infancy. It had struggled to get off the ground for two years before Jones was appointed its head, and if he had not been offered the position, it is likely that the group would have simply fizzled out while waiting for the return of Frank Reeve. Secondly, Jones's persona simply did not fit with the type of change the Commission was after; Jones demanded direct action that would have been more at home a few states southward. Jones maintained a precarious position within the Commission. Even without protesting, Jones managed to appear to local officials as inflammatory and reactionary, a reputation that could damage not only Jones, but the Human Rights Commission as well as it tried to form an identity.

If anything, Jones was a liability the group's members were silently relieved to be rid of, and the carefully crafted narrative that Jones had left due to illness was probably refuted due to the influence of Jones himself. Upon Jones's return to Indianapolis in December 1963, a piece from *The Indianapolis Star* that same month quickly backpedaled from the illness narrative, claiming that Jones had "been in South America nearly two years on missionary work, preaching and teaching in a university at Sao Fernando, Rio de Janeiro."[71] The author, Isabel Boyer, also alleged that in Brazil, Jones was "helping provide free meals to 250 children twice a week, providing shoes for them, and counseling poor families in Brazil. He also does missionary work, and teaches in San Fernando University at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil."[72] No source is attributed for this information. Jones himself also contributed to the reframing of the narrative, placing ads in the *Star* announcing his return from missionary work.[73]

What is the importance of studying Jones, then, if the Commission established its relevance in the community *after* Jones's departure? It is integral in understanding both Jones and the Peoples Temple, as well as the politics of Indianapolis, which the Temple helped shape. The two institutions, the Temple and the Commission, represented a faction of Indianapolis that, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, simultaneously revolved around Jones and repelled him. By renouncing Jones, local politicians could establish themselves as moderates because he was seen as so extreme, even before his Marxist views surfaced. Jones truly was many of the epithets assigned to him— a rabble rouser, a troublemaker, a progressive. The dynamics of Indianapolis, coupled with Jones's deteriorating psyche, created the perfect storm to make Jones feel as if he was being forced out of the city, leaving him and his congregation no choice but to flee. His persecution complex, which was so fundamental in much of the rhetoric he used in Jonestown, began in these warped Indiana roots.

The evidence of this can be found throughout almost all existing analyses of Jones's behavior. Many acknowledge Jones's madness— it is one of the most enthralling details of the case— yet few examine his descent into it. In one examination of cult leaders, author Doyle Paul Johnson lists one of the criteria of a charismatic leader as "seek[ing] organizational growth."[74] Though Johnson uses the Temple's growth in California to assert this point, it can be argued that Indianapolis provides more compelling evidence. It was in Indianapolis that Jones began his career, transforming from a student pastor at a congregation that evidently did not want him to a local dynamo who was successfully able to convince dozens of people who devote their lives to him and to uproot their livelihoods for him. Jones sought organizational growth in an almost endless number of ways— through advertisements, radio shows, community outreach, and, most importantly, through political advocacy. Jones thought he had found his niche within the Commission, but the resistance he faced in his attempts to make any real change in the city made Jones cynical and paranoid.

Even prominent Jonestown scholars overlook this period of time. Author James T. Richardson, the author of numerous works on Jonestown, breezes right over the foundation of the church in one article about it, writing, “Jones was affected by the racism of his area, but he somehow apparently overcame that racism and for a time developed an interracial, somewhat egalitarian church…”[75] Those two words, “somehow apparently,” contain the crux of Jones’s and the Temple’s history. Without them, without that period of time, there is no Jonestown, no Peoples Temple, no Jim Jones. Without that period, he would have simply become another local minister, making headlines every now and then for his church’s charitable works but otherwise largely irrelevant. That “somehow apparently” was composed of several factors that culminated in the tragic events of Jonestown that haunt the American psyche to this day.

Jones created a formidable following through direct action and through the revival circuit that garnered him enough influence to gain enemies in the city. Though certainly many of those enemies were imaginary or largely exaggerated, the damage it did to Jones’s psyche reduces the importance of their existence. Jones’s tenure on Mayor Boswell’s Human Rights Commission in the early 1960s sheds new insight on the growth of the Peoples Temple and the political climate of Indianapolis in the infancy of a civil rights movement it wanted to take no part in. Though Jones appeared to be on a path towards local politics, the meager amount of power Jones gained in Indianapolis set him up for the next nearly two decades for his megalomaniacal reign that ultimately culminated with the death of hundreds of his followers in the Guyanese jungle, a story that, unlike Jones's past, cannot be forgotten.

Annotated Bibliography

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Fondakowski, Leigh. *Stories from Jonestown*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

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Johnson, Doyle Paul. "Dilemmas of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of the People's Temple." *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 4 (1979): 315-23. doi:10.2307/3709960.

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Notes

[1] James Jones, interview, “Jim’s Commentary About Himself,” September 1977, FBI Audiotape Project, The Jonestown Institute, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA: para. 3.

[2] Jeff Guinn, *The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and Peoples Temple* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2018), 16.

[3] Jones, interview, “Jim’s Commentary About Himself,” para. 5.

[4] Ibid., para. 3.; Guinn, *The Road To Jonestown*, 19.

[5] Ibid., 31.

[6] Ibid., 25.

[7] Ibid., 26-27.

[8] Ibid., 24.

[9] Jones, “Jim’s Commentary About Himself,” para. 4.

[10] Guinn, *The Road to Jonestown*, 33.

[11] Ibid., 35.

[12] Ibid., 36.

[13] Ibid., 40.

[14] Ibid., 43.

[15] Ibid., 43-44.

[16] Guinn, *The Road to Jonestown*, 54.

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[19] Ibid., 55.

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[21] David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3.

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[23] Andrew B. Ramsey, “Civil rights and poverty problems still exist in Indiana,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 31, 1965, 9.

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[26] Ibid., 116.

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[31] Richard B. Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis, 1920-1970* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 74.

[32] Ibid., 75.

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[34] Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century,* 122.

[35] George Rose, “George Rose Sees Waste in New Human Rights Job,” *The Indianapolis News*, September 7, 1960

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[37] “Mayor to Name Rev. Jones as Head of Rights Group,” *The Indianapolis News*, February 17, 1961.

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[40] Ibid., 96.

[41] Leigh Fondakowski, *Stories From Jonestown* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 13.

[42] Ibid., 98.

[43] Ibid., 100.

[44] Ibid., 101.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*, 125.

[47] Guinn, *The Road to Jonestown*, 96.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Towne and Thrash, *The Onliest One Alive*, 49-50.

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[51] "City Desk Memos," *The Indianapolis News*, April 22, 1961, 13.

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