



Understanding Jonestown and Peoples Temple

Rebecca Moore

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Most people understand Peoples Temple through its violent end in Jonestown, Guyana in 1978, where more than 900 Americans committed murder and suicide in a jungle commune. Media coverage of the event sensationalized the group and obscured the background of those who died. The view that emerged thirty years ago continues to dominate understanding of Jonestown today, despite dozens of books, articles, and documentaries that have appeared. This book provides a fresh perspective on Peoples Temple and Jonestown, locating the group within the context of religion in America and offering a contemporary history that corrects the inaccuracies often associated with the group and its demise.

Although Peoples Temple has some of the characteristics many associate with cults, it also shares many characteristics of Black Religion in America. Moreover, it is crucial to understand the organization within the social and political movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Race, class, colonialism, gender, and other issues dominated the times, and so dominated the consciousness of the members of Peoples Temple. Here, Moore, who lost three family members in the events in Guyana, offers a framework of U.S. social, cultural, and political history that helps readers better understand Peoples Temple and its members.

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