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Jonestown: The Psychological Massacre

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Psychological tactics is a way for a person to change how people behave and think. It is thought that “Jim Jones studied the system of mind control that is discussed in the fictional book *1984* written by George Orwell” (Dittmann). This is thought because the different tactics Jones had used with the members of the Peoples Temple were similar to the tactics Orwell had used in his book. An example of a similarity between Jones and Orwell tactics is that “Jones made the members write down their fears and mistakes. With him knowing the fears and mistakes of his members he was able to humiliate them in front of everyone if they were to disobey him in any way. In the book “1984”, Orwell had broken the main character by making him face his fear of being covered with rats.” (Dittmann). With psychological tactics like manipulation, it allowed Jones to have the ability to control the minds of the people so that they would do what he wanted such as control their resources, their relationships with others, and change their way of life.

Jones used many tactics in order to control the resources that the members would provide to the Peoples Temple, and the resources he would restrain the members from having. Jones influenced people through sermons to do what he wanted. In Jones’ first sermons he would read bible passages that stated that followers should sell their belongings. The followers did just as he said because they respected and trusted Jones. With their trust in Jones, the members of the Peoples Temple started selling their homes and giving their wages to the Temple (Pick-Jones). Though they gave their money to the Temple, that was not the only resource that the members contributed to the cult. One of the main resources that the people provided and gave away was time. The members of the Peoples Temples spent much of their time helping Jones and growing the cult. Some of the members traveled to Guyana with him to build an agricultural commune. This agricultural commune was then named “Jonestown” (Wunrow). The time that the people spent on specific tasks determined on what Jones wanted. Jones restricted vacations and any leisure time for all members of the Peoples Temple. The people were unable to sing, dance, or have any kind of fun when Jones was around. Rather than having fun people were to do work and rituals. Jones made sure to keep the people busy so that they did not have any time to question or investigate (Collins). Even though time was a big resource that the people gave to Jones, it is not the only resource that he had control over. The people had restrictions on many outside sources such as: “internet, TV, radio, books, articles, newspapers, magazines, other media that gave information about non-cult related sources”. The only information that was given to the members is “cult-generated information and propaganda through Newsletters, magazines, journals, audiotapes, videotapes, YouTube, movies and other media.” (Collins). With the mind control that Jones had on the Peoples Temple allowed him to control what the members of the Peoples Temple believed. The psychological tactics such as behavior control and mind control allowed Jones to be able to control the time that the people contributed to the Peoples Temple and the resources that the people were allowed to have contact with.

Although the people of the temple gave many of their resources to Jones and the Temple, they also gave away many of their relationships, friendships, and families. Relationships and families were that the people once had were no longer there. Jones controlled relationships and families by choosing where and with whom everyone would live with (Collins). With Jones

knowing he was capable of determining where each person lived, he then decided he would tell people who they could have sexual intercourse with. Jones broke all ties between families and relationships by turning family against family and making them tell on others if they were not doing what Jones had ordered (Matthews). Jones used all the power he could to get people to do what he said. If someone were to disobey Jones in any way that would result in a punishment. Punishment for disobedience would include: “beating, torture, burning, cutting, rape, or tattooing/branding.”. The people knowing the consequences of not obeying Jones allowed him to have total control over the families and relationships of the members of the Temple. Not only were relationships and families ruined, but so were friendships. Jones would encourage members to spy on one another to know that nobody would disobey him (Collins). With the members spying on each other allowed Jones to know whether a member is not doing what he/she should be doing or if they were having abnormal thoughts or feelings about the leadership that Jones is portraying. With Jones having the loyalty from the members of the Peoples Temple, he was able to control their relationships, families, and friendships.

The psychological tactics that Jones had used on the members of the Peoples Temple changed their way of life. Jones changed how each member thought, felt, and acted. Jones controlled how members would think by limiting their resources such as what they would read about. Members were only allowed access to information that is cult related, other information was prohibited to all members of the Temple. With lack of outside information and only information that is given allowed the people to only believe what they are being told. To control the feelings of the members Jones would teach emotion blocking techniques. These techniques allowed him to block the feelings of homesickness, anger, and doubt from the members. The main way that Jones changed the people’s life is by controlling their actions. When Leo Ryan, a congressman, visited Guyana with a few other Americans. Jones ordered all members to assemble for a meeting and with the power that Jones had on the people, he was able to tell the members that the United States was going to attack and shoot their babies (Rosenburg). Jones controlled what every person did and in result, there was a mass killing of 918 people. Jones was able to create such a big influence on the member’s way of life using psychological tactics.

Some people believe that the members of the Peoples Temple were influenced from a sociological standpoint. Jones was a leader that started a religious group. How he was able to do this was through how he interacted with the members. With Jones having a good relationship with the members allowed them to do as he said and not disobey him (Maynard). Though Jones may have interacted with the members of the Peoples Temple, he connected with them more through their mind and emotions. The people believe that the actions that the members had done were because of the sociological influences from Jones himself. The rumors, panics, and bad behavior make people believe that this event in history was a sociological effect on Jones’ leadership (Maynard). Jones was able to control the members of the Peoples Temple by brainwashing them into believing that he knew everything and that he was a loyal and trustworthy man.

Jim Jones, the leader of the Peoples Temple, used psychological tactics to be able to control the member’s resources, relationships, and way of life. Jones was able to influence many people into doing what he wanted by using brainwashing and mind control techniques on the members of the Peoples Temple. With the success that Jones had with gaining the loyalty of the Temple members, he was able to make a big decision as a leader and talk the members into doing what he thought was best. Jones was able to impact the group by his speeches which led

up to the decision of all the members taking their own lives. This is known as the Jonestown massacre that took place in Guyana on November 18, 1978.

The Jonestown massacre was the largest mass killing up to the attack on the twin towers on September 11, 2001. As a result of knowing this information that this paper has given, it allows people to be able to understand how cults are created and how they are controlled. Cult leaders use psychological tactics in order to control the minds and behavior of others. Knowing the different tactics that a leader may use to influence a group of people allows others to see the signs of forming a cult and make an end to it before another large mass killing happens such as the Jonestown massacre.

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