

## **Cults, Sects, and the Jim Jones People's Temple**

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A cult is a new religious movements that offers a new revelation or a new insight into older beliefs. A cult is not part of mainstream society and attracts people who have broken away from other religious groups or people who are new to religion. These cults usually do not last long. Unlike a sect, a cult does not want to return to some pure form of religion. Also, cults place emphasis on the fact that they are not like any other religion. These cults also develop new terminology and new religious symbols that are unique to the cult. One of the main themes of these cults is the focus on the individual rather than the focus on society. Because of this focus on the individual, cults seem to originate in urban sectors. Most cults do not develop a bureaucratic organization and favor small, informal organization with a charismatic leader. Cults tend to attract Anglo-Saxons, individuals (rather than families), more females than males, well read people with higher education, people who are highly mobile, people who are financially stable, and people who have not been fully accepted into middle-class society.

Jim Jones and the People's Temple were originally part of the Disciples of Christ. They broke off and established their own group because Jim Jones had a divine revelation. Jim Jones moved the group from Indiana to northern California. In California, the group grew, but Jim Jones faced criticism from the outside community. He talked of suicide amongst his close circle of officiates if something about the inner workings of the group were discovered. He once brought up suicide in public. He later moved the group to Jonestown, Guyana. Members of the church cut contact with their families in the United States, another feature of a cult. Finally, Jim Jones ordered the ritual suicide of the entire congregation, at gunpoint reportedly, after an investigation by a Congressman. The Congressman was also shot and killed by men loyal to Jim Jones. Jim Jones' divine revelation, the movement of the group, the cutting of contact with family members, and the ritual suicide are all features of a cult.