

Why did Guyana do it?

There is an interesting background to The Peoples Church. The church originally started as a pentecostal church in Indianapolis in the 1950s. The church was in a deeply segregated city and was one of the few places where black and white working-class congregants sat together in church. Its members provided assistance to the poor, food, clothing, legal advice, and its pastor, Jim Jones gained a reputation for fostering racial integration. As the years went on the promise of racial equality and social activism enticed its members and the church grew. Its members wholeheartedly believed in the possibility of change. In 1974 a few church volunteers began clearing land in an agricultural settlement in Guyana. The initial reason for moving was to provide food for the hungry but survivors have stated: “the real reason was to create a community where they could escape the racism and injustice they experienced in the united states”.

Why go to Guyana you ask? Politically in 1970, Guyana had declared itself a “cooperative republic”, it cut all of its ties to the British monarchy. Guyana had improved its relationship with Cuba. Guyana even allowed Cuban troops to use it as a transit point for its war with Angola. The countries electoral fraud was very clear. Police and military intimidated the indo-Guyanese to vote for the ruling party. The country was struggling with corruption and an increasingly authoritative leader. Forbes Burnham the current leader started a national service program that was to be “Guyanas cultural revolution”. This service would help feed, clothe, and house its people without outside help. This movement is what brought the Peoples Temple to Guyana. At first, Jonestown was seen by the Guyanas government as a model agricultural community that shared its view of cooperative socialism. As time went on Complaints of abuse

by leaders of the cult and the fact that they had weapons at the camp and openly displayed them got back to The united states congress. This caused Congressman Leo Ryan to come to Guyana to investigate.

A year prior to the massacre In 1977 Jim Jones had become paranoid with the media's portrayal of the church. Jim and his numerous followers moved to an agricultural settlement in Guyana, Guyana is just east of Venezuela. The question many ask is what made Guyana lease him this land. The answer sounds simple. The Peoples Temple and its followers were allowed to occupy land in Guyana as part of the then government's policy of promoting agriculture locally. Prime Minister Samuel Hinds stated that "sometime before 1974, an application had been made to the Honorary Consul of Guyana in the USA by Jim Jones and The Peoples Church to acquire the land".The Consul granted Jones permission to come with 200 members mainly due to the agricultural focus of the group. The Prime Minister also suggested that it was a possibility that more than the stipulated number of persons had entered Guyana. Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission show that 3,852 acres of land in the northwest district had been leased to the group for 25 years. The lease was scheduled to expire on April 9, 1999. There have been multiple interviews and documents with Guyanese and United states officials including survivors of the tragedy that indicate over 800 people immigrated to Jonestown, violating the agreement initially made with Guyana. There have been reports by United States officials that sexual favors and bribes had been extended to Guyanese politicians to ignore the goings-on in the camp. Additional reports suggest that The People's Church had even threatened mass suicide. Guyanese officials deny all accusations. Initially, the camp was supposed to be a model community promoting agriculture and integrating with Guyanese life. Sadly we know this was

not true. In reality, the camp after 1977 became isolated and armed and the Guyanese government officials did not have access to it and turned a blind eye to its threat, eventually leading to the mass suicide of 900 people.