

Jonestown Competition

I am looking for you to make as many connections as possible between what happened with Peoples Temple, and various concepts in social psychology. As you are watching the rest of the movie, focus your notes around 3 themes:

Obedience to Authority: How people are obedient and how Jones established obedience and himself as an authority figure. How did the Peoples Temple experience look like the Milgram experiment? Connect as well here to the guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment.

Lifton's Theory of Thought Reform: What are some examples of Jones using the 8 methods of thought reform? Milieu Control? Mystical Manipulation? Etc. (You do not need to comment on all eight of them here)

Cognitive Dissonance: Examples of the various principles of cognitive dissonance we have discussed...

After we finish the movie, I will put you in groups. You will discuss each theme for a few minutes, then decide which theme you can do the best job with. Write up examples of this theme on a separate document for me to read. OR, you can develop pieces from two concepts that you feel go together. Your goal is to prove that your theme or theme the best, most powerful lens to use in understanding this group. I am looking for lots of connections, both more obvious and subtle, and I am also looking for specific examples from the statements and behavior of the group.

Your group work will count as a homework assignment, and your notes on the movie will also count as a homework assignment. Organize your notes on the movie around the themes listed above.

After finishing the work within your group, each group will have a 5-10 minute interview with me where we have a dialogue about your findings. Part of winning the competition involves how this dialogue goes, and the extent to which all members of the group contribute to the dialogue.

All members of the group that does the best job developing their theme (as judged by me), will get 3 extra points on the next exam.

NOTE: I have put an article on my webpage, an excerpt from "Inside Peoples Temple" (this is the article that Jones was so scared of being published he moved everyone to Guyana before it was released). There is a pile of great info in this article that you can use to develop these themes. It highlights the experience of 10 people who left the group, and these people reveal more of the really dicey and disturbing stuff that was happening in the group. If you use info from this article, that would be looked favorably upon by me as I judge who wins the competition.