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RUSH- C Block
April 3, 2006

Jonestown 2nd Cut

Leo Ryan was shot and killed on November 18, 1978, while investigating a cult society known as “Jonestown.” Ryan was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and had a reputation for investigating strange situations. He thought it was his duty as a Congressman to find out facts about what was going on in the world.¹

Jonestown was located in Guyana, and was established by Jim Jones. Jones was the leader of a religious cult called the “People’s Temple.” Jonestown was supposed to be a utopian community where Jones and his followers could be free from the U.S. government. In fact, the people of Jonestown were forced to work and were severely punished for not obeying orders.

Wanda Johnson related a disturbing story about her connection to the People’s Temple to *The New York Times*. She said that she first became involved with Jim Jones when she was trying to find religious comfort. Jones’ charisma and his visions of an ideal society enticed Johnson to cede her house, property, and money to the People’s Temple. Johnson was forced to agree to kill enemies of the People’s Temple and commit suicide at Jones’ order. When her 8-year-old son was sent to Jonestown, she soon realized how insane Jones was, but she was too scared to act against him. Jones probably used this same method to acquire other followers and money to support Jonestown.²

Many family members were concerned about their relatives who had been sent to Jonestown, so they started to form a rescue team. Leo Ryan felt that he was obligated to find out the truth about Jonestown, so he joined the team. They flew down to Guyana and

visited Jonestown. Jones had ordered the members of Jonestown to act happy and to not talk to Ryan. Nevertheless, Ryan learned of the people's general discontent and made an escape plan. At length, Jones consented to let anybody who was unhappy in Jonestown leave. Ryan and his party drove to the nearby airstrip, but just as they were about to depart, they were assaulted by Jones' guards. Ryan and several others were shot dead.

Jones knew that the shootings would attract the government's attention and would probably lead to the closure of Jonestown. As a result, he ordered a mass suicide. Local authorities found 913 bodies. Jonestown no longer exists, and there are hardly any traces of the community.

1. David Binder, "Coast Congressman Believed Slain Investigating Commune in Guyana," *New York Times* (19 November 1978): 1, 22. Available from: ProQuest, New York Times Historical Collection, Menlo School Lib. <<http://library.menloschool.org>> (accessed 27 March 2006).

2. Les Ledbetter, "Anguished Mother Tells How Fear Controlled Cult," *New York Times* (20 November 1978): 16. Available from: ProQuest, New York Times Historical Collection, Menlo School Lib. <<http://library.menloschool.org>> (accessed 27 March 2006).