



Hearing the Voices of Jonestown: Putting a Human Face on an American Tragedy (Religion and Politics)

Mary Maaga

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When over 900 followers of the People's Temple religious movement committed suicide in 1978, they left a legacy of suspicion and fear. Most accounts of this mass suicide describe the members as brainwashed dupes and overlook the Christian and socialist ideals that originally inspired People's Temple members. "Hearing the Voices of Jonestown" restores the individual voices that have been erased, so that we can better understand what was created - and destroyed - at Jonestown, and why. Piecing together information from interviews with former group members, archival research, and diaries and letters of those who died there, Mary McCormick Maaga describes the women leaders as educated political activists who were passionately committed to achieving social justice through communal life. She provides evidence that shows many of these women voiced their discontent with the actions of the People's Temple in the months right before the mass suicide. The book puts human faces on the events at Jonestown, confronting theoretical religious questions as Maaga attempts to reconcile how worthy utopian ideals come to meet such tragic and misguided ends.

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