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PRESENTATION

“Me and Jimmy Jones” An essay to be
read at the Indianapolis Literary Club on
Monday, March 17, 2025 by Dave Young

ONE

Let's start this talk with a scripture reading. Don't worry. Both the Reverend James Warren Jones and I are atheists. I am not going to preach to you, but I think this passage sets the tone I am looking for. This is Paul, speaking to a follower in Second Timothy, Chapter 3.

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!

I had never heard of the Reverend James Warren Jones

until November, 1978 when he orchestrated the mass suicide of 918 Americans at the agricultural commune he founded at Jonestown, Guyana . He was then 47 and I was 40. As I learned more about him, I was astonished to discover that we both grew up in a small, rural, somewhat impoverished county in east-central Indiana.

At that time, Randolph County had a population of about 28,000 souls, the men were mostly dirt farmers and factory workers. The main entertainment at that time was high school basketball and church socials which seemed to occur every night and to which all were invited. There was also the Masonic Lodge whose large number of secretive organizations were always up to something. Randolph County had the highest elevation in the state. The plus factor there was that the county was a dry spot in a state that was mostly swampy before the canals were built. That meant that the big four railroads came together in my home town, Union City, in their cross-country journey. On the downside, the soil was poor and the water table was hard to reach. The main crops seemed to be sorghum and tomatoes. As a child I worked in a family-owned sorghum mill, breaking cane and feeding it into a grinder. Large industry avoided Randolph county due to its lack of water. Even though the Wabash River originated nearby, the aquifer was hard to reach.

The highest point in Indiana is in a farm field called Hoosier Hill (Elevation 1,257 feet). Two miles north from is the tiny hamlet of Crete where Jimmy Jones was

born in 1931. Ten miles north-east of there is Union City. I came there to start the first grade after living in California during WWII. When my parents separated, my mother and I moved back to Indiana to live with her parents. When Jimmy's parents were evicted from their home in Crete, they moved 3 miles west to live with r'.re conventional, but weak and fun loving. Both were married many times. Our parents divorced at about the same time near the end of World War II.

After the Jones' divorced. Jimmy's mother moved with him to Richmond at the age of 16. He worked there as a hospital orderly while attending Richmond High School graduating in 1948. The school's athletic teams were called the Red Devils. Ironically, Red Devil Jimmy was destined to become a Marxist. Jimmy also took up street preaching in Richmond. He came from a vaguely Quaker family, but spent most of his free time checking out various churches in Lynn and Richmond. He developed a particular interest in the Pentecostal Church.

I was baptized by full immersion in the Disciples of Christ, or the Christian Church as we called it. Through a girl friend I became acquainted with the Reverend Xen Harvey who had recently been the Quaker pastor of the family of the actor, James Dean, who grew up about 30 miles northwest of me in Fairmont. For some strange reason, I decided to become a Quaker minister and with that in mind, attended Earlham College. As a student minister, I briefly took over a very old and poor Quaker church in the ghetto area of Richmond. Not far from there and a

few years before, Jimmy Jones started his street ministry. I soon discovered that I did not have what it took to lead a flock and then became a Unitarian before giving up on organized religion altogether. Jimmy Jones chose another path.

Jimmy and I had our epiphanies. Though not as dramatic as Paul's epiphany on the road to Damascus but life-changing nevertheless. Jimmy searched several churches trying to find one where he fit in. One day he wandered into a rural Pentecostal Church and was blown away by the speaking in tongues and the healing. He noted how captivated the members were during the very long and unprogrammed service. As a dedicated student of Marx and Lenin he was effectively an atheist but felt that he could advance his socialist goals by manipulating such a congregation and his course was set.

My epiphany came during my freshman year in college. I grew up in a family of hard-core Freemasons. Catholics were treated with a mixture of pity and contempt for their supposed lack of free-will. I had never been in a Catholic Church until I stumbled upon one in downtown Richmond. I was mesmerized by the magic show - the flickering votives, the swinging incense, and the chanting in Latin which I did not understand despite my two years of instruction in that language. I could not reconcile what I was seeing with my experience at Earlham. There in the unadorned college Quaker meeting house, was a silent coming together of souls who, without the aid of professionals, bore witness to how God was working in

their lives. My inner light went on and I realized that if I was going to make a career of religion the magic show would be the way to go, But, I could never make that happen.

TWO

I want to talk about Jimmy's time in Indianapolis from 1951 to 1965. I arrived in Indianapolis in 1967, so we had no connection there. In Indiana, he was an engaging con man who seemed to have had the leading clergy and the mayor of Indianapolis in his pocket for a time. Most of his flock, about 70%, were African-Americans. Even his detractors give him great credit for advancing the cause of civil rights in Indianapolis, a place often seen to be ten years behind national trends.

Jimmy was a careful student of the religious business. When he grew up and decided to get into faith healing he travelled to observe faith healers and to learn from them. As a pragmatist, he started off in the healing business slowly, testing his approach. He created the impression that he possessed extra-sensory powers by intermingling and eavesdropping on his congregation, picking up on their problems and concerns. Then, from the pulpit, he would call them out and speak of what was bothering them. At first he limited his healing to rather ordinary maladies such as headaches, back aches, and indigestion. It was only later that he got into pulling chicken gizzards out of the mouths of supplicants and proclaiming them to be free of cancer.

Jimmy was also cautious and conservative while building his church. He was always available to help his congregants with their smallest problems. He cultivated them by addressing their immediate needs. He accompanied them to work-out their financial problems with banks or utility companies which often did not take Black people seriously and he was always available to work with them to resolve their domestic problems. Hoosiers are known to be non-confrontational and Jimmy was usually careful to never be pushy or to intentionally ruffle feathers. Instead he attempted to resolve problems by coming up with solutions that benefitted both sides. For example, if a business refused to do business with Blacks, Jimmy would send them a polite letter co-signed by members of his church to let them know that they would become loyal, cash-paying customers if the business would only change its policy. That often worked as a win for both sides. He did not indulge in sit-ins or noisy protests.

While in high school, Jim took a job as an orderly at Reid Memorial Hospital in Richmond. There he met a nurse, Marceline Baldwin. She was three years older. She had previously been married for a short time. Marceline was impressed by the care and compassion he had shown toward her patients and they developed a relationship which resulted in their marrying in 1949. The marriage gave them one biological child and they soon adopted three Korean children. Then they became the first family in Indiana to adopt an African-American child. Later, they

adopted several others into what they called their “rainbow” family.

Due to his positive experience as an orderly, Jim had considered a career in medicine. After two years of study at IU in Bloomington, from 1948 to 1950, he decided his future was in the ministry. He never got into the swing of social life at IU as he spent all of his weekends back in Richmond so that he could spend time with Marceline. After their marriage, she joined him in Bloomington for his second year of studies.

Arriving in Indianapolis in 1951, Jim and Marceline settled in a house on Villa Avenue on the South Side. Jim took whatever jobs he could find while selling monkeys on the side for \$29 each. He’d always had an unusual interest in animals. As a child, he often killed small animals and then staged elaborate funerals for each of them. At some point he received a shipment of sick and dying monkeys and refused to pay for them. This story made the Indianapolis newspapers and soon Jim was out of the monkey business. Meanwhile, Marceline provided the main support by working as a nurse at the Riley Hospital for Children.

In 1951, Jim made debuted in the preaching business when he took an unpaid position as a student pastor at Somerset Methodist Church, which was located at the intersection of South Keystone Avenue and Bacon Streets west of Beech Grove. It isn’t clear why he chose Somerset but it was near where he and Marceline lived on

Villa Avenue. Marceline's parents had been active in their Methodist Church and Jim was also pleased that the church's national credo emphasized welcoming and accepting people from all walks of life. It turned out that Somerset was not a good fit for him. He was never assigned any significant work other than the routine housekeeping necessary to keep the struggling church afloat. The church was located in a working class area of the city with few African-Americans. The congregation was not welcoming at all. Jim nevertheless gave a glowing interview to Richmond's newspaper, the Palladium Item, speaking of all the wonderful things he was doing with the youth at Somerset and the recreational program he had established. It was a gross exaggeration, but he did help develop a playground and spent some time with children as a youth minister. In less than a year he was gone. It was rumored that he was dismissed as he had had misused the church's funds, but that seems unlikely as he never had access to them. Somerset Methodist Church soon became defunct and the church was torn down to make way for a gas station.

During this time he made the acquaintance of Ron Haldeman, a Quaker minister whose mission was to help the poor and downtrodden. I never met Ron, but I recall seeing him as he often walked the streets of downtown Indianapolis looking for souls to save. Haldeman was always dressed in coat and tie but looked shabby nevertheless. Ron had some relationship with the Disciples of Christ and they let him use, as an office, the kitchen in a house they owned. Jim's family had some

vague connection with the Quakers and Jim probably played on that to shore up a relationship with Ron. They hung out together in the kitchen and Jim got some ideas about how to start his own church. It wasn't a lasting relationship.

THREE

around 1953, Jim became an associate minister at Laurel Street Tabernacle, a Pentecostal church which was affiliated with the Assemblies of God. Jim was allowed to preach a faith healing sermon on Sunday afternoons. Jim was always seeking respectability but he couldn't get the Assemblies of God to ordain him. He did manage to get ordained by a small group that had broken away from the main body. The Independent Assemblies of God bestowed that honor on him in February, 1956 and recognized his new church, The People's Temple of the Wings of Deliverance that Jim had incorporated in April of the previous year. Laurel Street was caught up in an ugly struggle with the "Latter Rain" movement which was in conflict with the main body of the Pentecostal Church over the power of individual charismatic preachers. They preferred what they called the "Full Gospel" approach. The Assemblies of God considered the "Latter Rain" people to be extremist. Jones was greatly influenced by another Hoosier, William Graham, a Pentecostal who worked out of Jeffersonville. Yet another Hoosier preacher who was active in the "Latter Rain" was Lester Sumrall from South Bend. He was one of the founding members of the Laurel Street

Tabernacle.

You can't cover the life of Jim Jones without mentioning his association with the very successful Reverend Major Jealous Divine, or Father Divine as he called himself. At the age of 26, Jim was still studying religious leaders when in early 1957 he convinced Father Divine to give him an audience. So Jim journeyed to Devine's luxurious 72 acre estate, known as Woodmont, just outside Philadelphia. Father Devine was 80 years old, but still going strong. They spent a day together and in the following years Jim occasionally flew to Philadelphia to spend time with him until Father's death in 1965.

Divine's theology was rather murky yet he felt no need to explain himself since he was God and capitalism was his thing. Nevertheless, money flowed in from followers all over the world and was used to start up or buy successful companies which provided employment for members of his International Peace Mission. He didn't have much to say about civil rights, but he did take a firm stand against lynching. He also toyed with the concept of reincarnation. When his first wife, Peninniah, died in 1943, he married a twenty-two year old insisting that she was the reincarnation of Peninniah. Since Father preached sexual abstinence, he claimed that the union was never consummated.

Six years after Father Devine's death, Jim made a move to take over the Peace Mission. He arrived at Woodmont from California with two hundred of his followers and

declared that he, at the age of 34, was, in fact, the reincarnation of Father Divine and the rightful owner of his estate. This did not sit well with Father's true believers as they never accepted Father's death and continued to speak of him in the present tense. A two-year battle over the estate ended with a win for Father's second wife, Mother Sweet Angel Divine.

Jim had learned several things from Father Divine. First, that a human being could become God or at least be God-like. He began to insist that his followers call him Father or Dad and that they call Marceline Mother. He was impressed by Father's strong sense of community and the advantage of having all members pool their assets so that they could enjoy the fruits of capitalism. Jim supported his community with soup kitchens and the distribution of used clothing. He and Marceline also were involved with several nursing homes. He also learned that after Father had to limit his appearances due to his age, he tape-recorded all of his sermons so that his believers could stay in touch with his thoughts. Jim, who often ranted into the wee hours of the morning on the Jonestown public address system also recorded his deep thoughts and these have been preserved for eternity in the archives at San Diego State University.

Still seeking respectability, Jim applied for ordination in the main-stream Disciples of Christ. The Disciples were conveniently headquartered in the Irvington neighborhood of Indianapolis and were known for a loose hierarchical structure which gave a lot of autonomy to individual

churches. They initially turned him down due to his lack of a bachelor's degree. Jim continued with his part-time education at Butler University and was awarded a Bachelor in Secondary Education degree in 1961. He was finally ordained by the Disciples in a ceremony at the Peoples Temple Christian Church in February, 1964. The Reverend Andrew Brown gave the invocation. This was a financial benefit for both the Peoples Temple and the Disciples because after joining a main-stream denomination Jones could claim significant tax exemptions for his church and the national organization of the Disciples could count on contributions of more than a million dollars over ten years from a church that claimed over a thousand members. In 1977, the Disciples disfellowshipped the Peoples Temple. They were concerned about Jim's authoritarian style and his ideology which had become more radical after he left Indiana.

After leaving Laurel Street in 1955, Jim moved his followers to the Old North Side of Indianapolis, a large frame structure located at 1502 N. New Jersey. The building had formerly been a Mormon Church and after Jim moved the church in 1958, it became a Baptist Church and eventually a private residence. The move in 1958 was to the former Tenth Street Temple of the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation which had moved to North Meridian Street. Jim had negotiated the lease or purchase under very favorable terms with the well-established Rabbi Maurice Davis. They knew one another due to their mutual interest in the civil rights movement but there is no reason to believe that they had

a close relationship. The rabbi was known for his opposition to cults and had taken on a fight with the Unification Church, familiarly known as the “Moonies” (founded by the Korean Reverend Sun Kyung Moon). Jim and his four associate ministers operated there until 1965 when Jim decided to move the congregation to California. A few years later, the former temple, located at the corner of Tenth and Delaware streets burned to the ground, apparently by arson. It is now a vacant lot.

FOUR

Jim had a brief political career in Indianapolis. They used to say that Indianapolis was the northernmost southern city and the southernmost northern city. If you were an African-American in the South it didn't matter how close you got as long as you didn't get too high. While in the North you could get as high as you wished as long as you didn't get too close.

[Sidebar material - not part of oral presentation]

The Klu Klux Klan ran rampant in the 1920's, but since Indiana was a Union State, the emphasis was more on intimidation rather than violence. At the height of their popularity in 1925, the Klan in Indiana had approximately 250,000 members, almost all white protestants. They controlled the governor's office and the legislature. The Indiana Klan probably saw Catholics and Jews as more of a threat than African-Americans. The Klan reign in Indiana took a rapid downslide in 1925 when their leader, D.C. Stephenson became involved in a scandal that brought the membership down to about 40,000 by 1930. Stephenson, who had made a small fortune selling official Klan merchandise, violently raped a young woman and caused her eventual death by confining her while ignoring her serious injuries.

Another stain on Indiana occurred in 1930 when two African-Americans accused of rape and murder were lynched in Marion, IN. A photograph of the two dangling from a tree was widely circulated and the anthem "Strange Fruit," sung by Billie Holiday in 1939, is considered by some to have been the beginning of the civil rights movement. The Klan apparently had no direct involvement in this lynching.

So things were a little muddled in non-confrontational, 1950's Indianapolis with its "live and let live" ethos. There was no *de jure* segregation but plenty of the *de facto* sort. Indianapolis had a relatively strong Black middle class due in part to the US Army Finance Center and the US Postal Service which provided thousands of African-American employees with livable incomes. They were not anxious to stir things up.

Charlie Boswell, mayor of Indianapolis, was appointed to fill a vacant position in early 1959 and was elected to a four year term later in the year, serving until he resigned in August, 1962 when his friend, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, arranged for him a much better paying job as Postmaster of Indianapolis. Early on, Boswell had the idea of forming an Indianapolis Human Rights Commission. However, it got off to a slow start as Boswell's first choice for director was not immediately available. The advertised salary was only \$7,000 a year (about the same as what an experienced high school teacher might have earned at the time). It had no staff other than the director and was not envisioned as a full-time job. Cynics might say that the Commission was formed to create the illusion that something was being

done with the emerging civil rights movement.

So in February, 1961, Jim was selected to be director of the HRC. Jim was allowed to continue his preaching and faith healing. He held the job for only ten months. Then, in December 1961, he requested an extensive leave for reasons of health. The request was granted and Jimmy left, never to return. His experience with the Human Rights Commission was unsettling. A few months after he started, he was ordered by Mayor Boswell to submit all of his official communications to the mayor's office for review and was told to maintain a low profile. Nevertheless, he was successful in quietly integrating several local institutions. The part of society that had ignored him as a preacher zeroed in on him with criticism and hate mail. He was unable to charm the political class and they seemed to have no respect for his faith healing talent. He apparently decided to give up politics and restrict his efforts to people over whom he could have complete control.

The decision to move to California came about because Jim was running out of room to operate in Indianapolis. Others were stepping up to advance civil rights. The congregation had dwindled from a claimed few thousand souls in 1961 to several hundred in 1965. This was partly due to the two years that Jim and his family had spent in Brazil from 1961 to 1963 trying to establish a commune there. Perhaps it was due to the conflict among the four associate ministers he had left in charge of the Peoples Temple during his absence. Some of those were

bible-based, while others preached the doctrine of apostolic socialism favored by Jim. Whether he believed it or not, Jim voiced a concern about nuclear annihilation. He envisioned a nuclear attack on Indianapolis (perhaps not so unlikely considering the wide-spread Cold War hysteria). He wanted to relocate his flock to a safer place. He also wanted to test their loyalty. All who were to accompany him to his new utopia in northern California were ordered to sell their earthly goods and transfer the proceeds to him. Not everyone bought into this, but 141 congregants took the bait. If there had had been any question before, the Peoples Temple was now definitely a cult.

The new utopia was to be in Ukiah, California, the county seat of Mendocino County, located in the redwood forest on the Pacific coast about two hours north of San Francisco. The population of Ukiah was approximately 15,000. Jim used Ukiah as a base of operations as he established missions and recruited new members throughout California, eventually building the church to well over one-thousand members.

FIVE

How much fun would the Human Comedy be if we couldn't examine the extra-marital affairs of preachers and politicians who only want to be loved by everyone? Two of Jim's contemporaries who were actively involved in the Indianapolis civil rights movement in the 1960 come to mind. This topic is worthy of another paper and I don't

have the time to get into it here. If you go to our club's website, you can read my take on the Episcopal Bishop Paul Moore, formerly dean of Christ Church Cathedral on Monument Circle and Methodist Bishop James Armstrong, formerly pastor of the once largest Methodist Church in Indiana, Broadway Methodist. Let's move on to the Reverend Jim Jones.

[sidebar material - not part of the oral presentation]

The Reverend James Armstrong was a phenomenal success in the Methodist Church. He had developed the Broadway Methodist Church at Fall Creek and Broadway into the largest Methodist congregation in Indiana. The church rewarded him in 1968 by making him the youngest, at 43 years of age, bishop in the country. He served at first in the Dakotas and then in the North Central Jurisdiction which included Indiana. He also became president of the National Council of Churches and was considered one of the most influential ministers in the United States. In December, 1983 he resigned from both positions after he was caught in flagrante delicate with a young female congregant. The South Indiana Methodist Conference revoked his clergy credentials due to his "failure in personal holiness." In 2002, Armstrong wrote his memoir "Feet of Clay on Solid Ground" in which he copped to his infidelity. He had become involved with the woman, whom he had baptized after he had counseled her through an unhappy marriage. In an interview long after the Jonestown Massacre he claimed that he had known Jim Jones but had kept his distance from him.

Armstrong went on to teach theology at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fl. While passing through there on one of my winter vacations I phoned him and we had a short chat. He agreed to sit down with me but he died at the age of 94 before we could get together.

The Reverend Paul Moore was never caught up in a public scandal during the years 1957 to 1964 when he was Dean of Christ Church Cathedral Episcopal Church on Monument Circle. He served there and did what he could to racially integrate the church until 1964 when he was elected as

Bishop of Washington, D.C. Then in 1972 he became the Bishop of the Diocese of New York, a position he held until his retirement in 1989. While serving in New York, he was possibly the best known Episcopal cleric in the United States

Moore came from a very wealthy New York family. After graduating from Yale she served as a Captain in the U.S. Marine Corps and was highly decorated for his heroism in the WWII Battle of Guadalcanal. He was married to his first wife for 30 years and fathered nine children. Following her death in 1973, he remarried a much younger woman and remained married to her for 25 years when she died of alcoholism. She had reportedly discovered his bi-sexuality in 1990.

Paul Moore died In 2003 at the age of 83. When his will was probated it was discovered that he bequeathed a substantial sum to a man unknown to the family who claimed to have been Moore's long-time lover. His daughter, Honor, herself a bi-sexual, went public with the story in 2008. First in an article in the New Yorker Magazine, then a book "The Bishop's Daughter: A Memoir."

Finally, in 2018, the Bishop who followed Moore in New York issued a pastoral letter describing Moore as "a sexual predator who engaged in long-time patterns of sexual exploitation and abuse."

Jim Jones, our man of the cloth, had an interesting sex life. According to Jim, whose word is not worth much, he was faithful to Marceline for the first several years of their marriage. And then, wonder of wonders, a wealthy woman made him an offer that he and Marceline could not refuse. If Jim would go to bed with her, she promised to give his church five thousand dollars. Marceline, convinced that this was for the greater good, agreed. Sex then became a little looser after they moved to California and picked up several hundred new adherents. He reportable bedded both men and women and would have you believe that the sex was never for his gratification but

a sacrifice he made to keep his community together. By the time they got to Guyana, Marceline was experiencing severe back pain due to her arthritis and her sexual activity was limited. Jim then openly lived with two other members of his flock who each bore him a child. He rotated his sleeping arrangements among all three of them.

Jim was arrested on December 13, 1963 by the Los Angeles Police Department. While in the balcony of a movie theatre that was showing the film "Dirty Harry," Jim motioned to a man and indicated that he should follow him to the restroom. Unfortunately for Jim, the man was an undercover policeman. In the restroom he began to masturbate in front of the police officer who then arrested him for lewd conduct. In court, Jim told the judge that he had a prostate problem and his doctor had advised him to jump in place to ease his discomfort. The judge agreed to dismiss the charge if Jim would sign a statement to the effect that the arrest was made with probable cause. Jim signed the statement and brought in the church's lawyer to get the record expunged. A legal wrangle ensued and the outcome was never made clear. His paranoia then became more apparent and he maintained that the Los Angeles Police department was out to get him and that the arrest was a set up. The whole affair hastened his decision to move his church to Guyana in 1965. One wonders what the star of "Dirty Harry," Clint Eastwood, would have thought of this incident. Would it have "made his day?"

So, in California, drugs, sex, and paranoia did him in and forced him to move The Peoples Temple to South America where he ultimately killed almost all of his followers when his community began to fall apart. His paranoia was perhaps understandable. The authorities really were coming after him and it was becoming clear that the agricultural commune he envisioned was not sustainable due in part to its poor soil and remote location. Relatives of the new members he had recruited in California were concerned about those who had forsaken everything to follow Jim to Guyana. They suspected that their kinfolk were being held there against their will. Their U.S. Congressman, Leo Ryan, flew to Guyana to make inquiries and Jim's henchmen murdered him and his staff along with several others. Jim knew that the gig was up and brought out the cyanide-laced Flavor Aid. He had been running suicide drills, which he called "white nights" in the previous months so his flock was ready.

Forty-six years have passed since Jim orchestrated the mass suicide-murder of 918 souls in Guyana in 1978. At the end, he hated the United States of America and attempted to leave a reputed fortune of ten million dollars to the Russian embassy in Guyana. The money eventually went into a fund to settle claims. Relocating some nine-hundred bodies to the U.S. was an expensive and complicated process and the government of Guyana wanted nothing more to do with Jonestown and its dead bodies. They let the jungle reclaim the site. Jim was buried at sea so that there would be no grave to visit.

What is the legacy of the Reverend James Warren Jones in 2025? A large trove of literature about Jones and Jonestown has developed over the years, much of which I have surveyed. While Jones will always be a monster in the main-stream media, there has been an effort by religio-historical scholars to view the Jonestown mass suicide in a broader context. Perhaps it is just a matter of scale. Regrettably, suicide as an expression of religious salvation is nothing new.

Religious people have been killing themselves for two thousand years. Sometimes as a final statement to oppressive authorities and sometimes to gain an early entrance to some sort of heaven. In the year 78 of the current era, at Masada, nine hundred and sixty Sicari Jews reportedly committed suicide (technically, they murdered one another because their faith prohibited suicide) before they could be overcome by the Roman Legion. In modern times, another mass suicide, actually suicide by cop, occurred in 1993 when the Branch Davidians of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, led by the charismatic David Koresh, refused to honor a warrant served by the U.S. Alcohol, Firearms and Tax agency and murdered four government agents. A fifty-three day siege followed and when the FBI finally breached the Davidian compound in Waco, TX, seventy-six members were immolated. Not long after that, in 1997, a San Diego cult known as Heaven's Gate committed mass suicide when thirty-nine of them ingested apple sauce laced with phenobarbital chased by vodka.

I often think how our lives nearly intertwined. Fate pushed us in different directions. I left the world of preaching and when the opportunity presented itself, began a thirty-year career as a low-level bureaucrat in a federal government that Jim Jones feared and detested. Although he was always an atheist at heart who used the Bible to promote his brand of Marxism, he built his church by lifting people up, helping them solve their problems, and giving them hope that their lives could be better in a loving community.

So this is almost the end of the story of two kids from Randolph County who chose different paths. I have outlived the Reverend James Warren Jones by forty years, but I will soon be forgotten. Jones will live on in infamy for a very long time. As the Greek Poet, Pindar, advised: "Become what you are." Sic transit gloria mundi.

For further reading:

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Hamlett, Ryan. "The Devil on the Old Northside". Historic Indianapolis, February 25, 2014

Higgins, Will. "Jim Jones: His Indianapolis Life Included Performing Miracles and Selling Monkeys" The Indianapolis Star, June 24, 2019

Mitchell, Dawn. "Retro Indy: Jim Jones and the People's Temple in Indianapolis," The Indianapolis Star, November 2013

Reiterman, Tim. "Raven: The Untold Story of the Rev. Jim Jones and His People". New York; Archer Perigee, 2008

*A large archive regarding Jim Jones and Jonestown is maintained at San Diego State University and is easily accessible at:
<https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/>*

[END. DAVE YOUNG 3/14/25]