

# 504 Incorrect - Koolaid

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

new religious movements, jonestown, religion, people, kool aid, cult, fucking, suicide, drinking, nerds, coercion, black women, joke, temple, violence, episode, folks, revolutionary, megan, facts

## SPEAKERS

Megan Goodwin, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst

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Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:18

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Megan Goodwin 00:41

Yeah you can. What's up nerds? Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions race, gender and politics.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:48

Hi, hello. I'm Ilyse Morgenstein-Fuerst historian of religion Islam recently civilization and South Asia. How're you doing Meghan?



Megan Goodwin 00:58


Oh, oh you know, like the dude, I abide. How are you doing?





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:03


It's July. I'm wearing like a 35 year old t shirt. We're good to go. Hurray! and speaking about good good to go. The thing that we're gooding to go on is an incorrect episode. Yes, incorrect. Where we kindly but firmly insist that religion does more and different work than you dear


nerds, might think that it does. So on today, I will trigger the shit out of Megan with three simple words. Hold onto your butts here they come, "drinking the Kool-Aid"


 M Megan Goodwin 01:46  
No! No! Nerd rage!!


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:52  
Because KoolAid is like maybe two words. Is that the rage?


 M Megan Goodwin 02:00  
It That's a good guess. But no, actually no. There's more.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:04  
Well, what did I do then?


 M Megan Goodwin 02:10  
You activated the part of my brain that makes the sound of ultimate suffering. When three factors combine smugness plus incorrectness plus injustice.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:19  
Oh, no. I am Yes, I'm concerned. But, tell me more.


 M Megan Goodwin 02:27  
Right. So we've already done a cult episode which was episode one of Smart Girl Summer I got myself so worked up while we were recording that that you can actually hear me smacking the microphone with my Muppet arms. True story. True story. So all right, I'm not I'm not going to make this episode just my standard please please for the love of God and all that is holy, please stop fucking saying cults already. I'm not going to do that, I'm not.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:00  
But since we've already said it before, what if it's useful for me? Shockingly, sum up what you told us in that episode, so that our nerds have like, you know, a basis.


 Megan Goodwin 03:11  
Yeah, okay. Okay. Sure. Hit it.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:13  
So, in that episode, you told us that first, people use the word "cult" to mean religion they don't like

 Megan Goodwin 03:23  
yes, I do say that. I say that all the time. I am actually cited on the Wikipedia page for cult saying that yes, can confirm.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:33  
So people use cults mean religion, they don't like, number one. Number two, cult is often shorthand for concerns about things like coercion or brainwashing or, and we talked a lot in that episode about how coercion definitely exists, but brainwashing does not and that neither of those frameworks actually explain New Religious Movements.

 Megan Goodwin 03:56  
Right. All right. Yes. So coercion absolutely exists. That is correct. Brainwashing, not a thing. Yes, coercion does happen in groups that we think of as New Religious Movements. But coercion happens everywhere because people are genuinely or people generally are shitty to each other. So the if we're thinking about new religious movements, assuming that someone who is in a people's temple say are only there because they're forced to be there or they've been tricked or they're just dumb is a dumb stupid in the face way to think about participation in new religious movements. Yes, it's more complicated than that.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:36  
Okay, so then the third thing we said on that episode and that's useful for nerds to hear now is that "cult" also works to shut down and punish folks for doing religion too differently to beyond the pale or too freely.

 Megan Goodwin 04:53  
Yeah, yeah. So my go-to on this is FLDS is Mormon Fundamentalism, that was a big chunk of my book "Abusing Religion", and a lot of the arguments that got made for why they need to send literal tanks to pick up 400 kids was because a Mormon fundamentalist in Texas were, according to the House of Representatives, taking advantage of religious freedom. Right?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:20

Yeah, you're too free!



Megan Goodwin 05:22

Yep. Yep. Yep. Like you. I know. I know. We said that we liked freedom, but you're doing it wrong. So yeah, I did. I said all of that. I say it a lot. Actually. Yeah, I shan't say it again...today. I'm gonna keep today's episode specifically focused on people's temple, their communitarian agricultural project, which most folks remember as "Jonestown". And why quote, drinking the Kool Aid, quote is not just incorrect, although it is, but also really fucking racist. And specifically, it really fucking misogynoir-ist, meaning it does race and gendered violence to black women. But that's it. I'm just going to talk about those three things.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:00

Sure, I'll believe it when the hear's it. Why don't we give you a go at that?



Megan Goodwin 06:07

Yeah. Okay. Well, I mean, I'm also going to cheat and stash a bunch of like, further readings and listenings and watchings in the show notes. So...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:12

that I believe and that's because I have very little to add, but now Okay, let's, let's like, let's like get this party started. Yeah. Tell me what is so goddamn incorrect about "drinking the Kool Aid".



Megan Goodwin 06:37

Oh yeah! See, I can make Kool-Aid jokes too. I can do it. It's not that I am opposed to cracking lies about some truly dark shit. Hello. Have you seen anything I've ever published and or listened to even a little bit of this here pod?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:52

I mean, yes. I have 15 years of your redonk jokes that populate my brain.



Megan Goodwin 07:01

And likewise and I cherish you So like I'm not I'm not mad at jokes I'm not but I am mad both

and know, and I cherish you. So like, I'm not I'm not mad at jokes. I'm not but I am mad, both about people punching down, and about people insisting it's their right to punch down in this particular case, because obviously the folks who died at Jonestown were stupid, brainwashed sheeple, who brought their deaths on themselves by being too dumb to not commit suicide. When a mentally ill wanna-be father Divine with cheap sunglasses and a ham radio told them to off themselves in their kids. And to them I say, extremely fucking incorrect. "Not correct".



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:33

Um, I am just going to say the thing out loud now and I can feel through the airwaves. That you are, you are hype. You are you're approaching she-hulk levels. So I want to remind you that you promised me, specifically that you would not drop a million facts on our nerds, that you would keep this together and like relatively in our pants, and I'm gonna hold you to it. Okay.



Megan Goodwin 08:02

I am a little bit all caps Megan right now I hear it. Okay. Yes. I'm going to be sentence case Megan. I am going to give you a top three about why drinking the Kool Aid is incorrect. And deeply fucked up. And please don't say it any more. Please. Taking a deep breath.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:19

Okay, good cleansing.



Megan Goodwin 08:22

Okay first, and least importantly, it wasn't fucking Kool Aid.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:30

I'm sorry. I already lost...okay.



Megan Goodwin 08:34

Just it was cyanide laced flavor aid. This is nitpicking. But I guess if you're gonna make light of the tragic murder of hundreds of people who were just trying to make the world a better place, maybe check your lipstick first. That's all I'm saying.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:47

Yeah, I mean, you should know if you're having a slush puppy or an icy you should have the details matter in a joke a good joke has good details.



Megan Goodwin 08:55

Exactly. So this isn't even a good joke. But second, far more importantly, people use drink the Kool Aid to mean this person is stupid or brainwashed or has unquestioningly accepted an extreme irrational and dangerous worldview to the detriment of themselves and others. A of all: and as we've already discussed, brainwashing is not a thing. And again, check out the cults episode for more on this, and brainwashing is not what happened in people's temple agricultural project. Peoples Temple was a predominantly black New Religious Movement, devoted body and soul to creating an egalitarian, anti-racist, anti-capitalist society. The people of People's Temple were scholars and revolutionaries, activists and optimists. They lived together, worked together, celebrated and worshipped and mourned and protested together. Most of all, they were human beings working as hard as they could to build a kinder, more just world, a world worth living in worth saving. They were people and surviving members still talk of creating that intentional community in Guyana as building heaven on earth. That's a direct quote. So yeah, public perception of the movement centered, it's still centered on Jim Jones as the leader. But as our beloved Judith Weisenfeld teaches us, no one stays in a quote unquote cult because of a charismatic leader. They might join for one, but they stay because of a compelling worldview, a community that values them and cares for them, a chance to be more than they were, to really make a difference. Jim Jones betrayed that vision and those commitments and these people. Yes, he directed the residents of People's Temple Agricultural Project to end their lives. Yes, he absolutely did that. Most of them, hundreds, hundreds of them, black women and their children, poison themselves at gunpoint. That's not suicide, revolutionary or otherwise, that is a fucking massacre.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:53

Yeah. And I think it's really important for me to say out loud, that when we think about new religious movements, and particularly new religious movements, that get labeled cults, and particularly those cults that either are affiliated with, or victims of violence, and especially self inflicted violence, because there's a bunch of these that happen over the years, it's really easy to make their suicides, A) purposeful, suicidal, deranged, right, like so we've all of the mental illness shaming that happens around suicide and suicidal ideation. Which this podcast is not for. But more importantly, there's also this way that like, we lose the context of power and coercion when we claim that these folks are just stupid sheeple. So I know we've said this a places I'm really just trying to underline your point, Megan, that like committing suicide or ingesting poison, when the choice is poison or gun is not a choice. Nope, that is not what agency looks like, this is not a free market here. And so when we lose those details, when those details fall out, we need to pay attention to what the story is actually about. Uh huh.



Megan Goodwin 12:12

Yes, yes,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:14

I'm making the story about a white man, charismatic leader, as opposed to the hundreds of women and children predominantly of color. And predominantly black on top of that is like,

that's a story in between the margins, which I think is why you're really pushing us to see why drinking the Kool Aid is incorrect.

M

Megan Goodwin 12:39

I really, really, really am. And I'm very glad that you're, you are encouraging us to think about the context in which folks are making impossible choices, right? Because no, drinking cyanide flavored or cyanide laced flavor aid at gunpoint is not a choice. It is double, not a choice when that data is pointed at your kid. Like it just wow. But third, and most importantly, the mass murder of black women and children is not a fucking punch line. Yeah, people. Yeah, let's say that again. Yeah, let's do it. The mass murder of black women and children, which is what happened at Jonestown is not a fucking punch line. People's Temple was, as I have said, and will provide many receipts for, a predominantly black new religious movement. But the leadership was overwhelmingly white, and many of them were white women. So regardless of what that cranky ADL lawyer who laid into me on Twitter thinks the Jonestown Massacre is an act of white supremacist violence, and specifically white women's violence against black women and children. White supremacy I will remind not not you, Ilyse because you know this, but I'll remind our listeners is not just about the Klan or the proud boys, it's anywhere and everywhere that we value white lives, white bodies, and qualities associated with whiteness over other lives, bodies and qualities. In what's now the United States, white supremacy is deeply, though not exclusively rooted in anti black racism. Jim Jones and the white leaders of his community saw the lives of People's Temple members again, overwhelmingly black lives. They saw those lives as disposable, as commodifiable, as a way to make a point about the supremacy of their murderous white led worldview. And here's the thing nerds, it's not just that Jim Jones and the white women leaders of his community betrayed and murdered hundreds upon hundreds of black women and children in Guyana. Though that certainly would be enough for me to tell you that you need to stop saying drinking the Kool Aid. But after this heinous crime, no one wanted their bodies. Guyana said that they were a US problem. America wanted to leave them in Guyana. The bodies of unclaimed Jonestown victims were shipped in rubberized bags from the Guyanese jungle to an Air Force Base in Delaware where they languished for months. Yeah, yeah, yeah. America ultimately decided that the Jonestown dead were not human, and therefore not America's problem. Rendering these teachers and veterans, workers, and revolutionaries, as cri..as Cristina Sharp might put it, "unmournable". So when you make jokes about drinking the Kool Aid, you trivialize and you invisibilize, their heroic commitment, their revolutionary vision, the brutality and injustice of their murders. You contribute to what JZ Smith called the pornography of Jonestown. And if you're American, you're adding one more violent insult to litany of black women in this country our country has murdered and betrayed. The black women of People's Temple went to Guyana because they saw that this country, the country of their births, the country that would decades later murder Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor, that this country had no future for them. They gave everything to try and survive and build a future for themselves and their families. Their lives fucking mattered and their deaths are not a joke. Do better. Goodwin out.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:02

Well, I don't really know how to follow that mic drop. But the script says I'm supposed to do a wrap up a review while you take deep breaths. So you take some breaths, maybe off mic. I don't know if like breathing into the mic is a great idea for our listeners. But okay, I will do a

little bit of a wrap up, which is really simple nerds. Drinking the Kool Aid is not a benign joke. It is in fact, a joke steeped, if not born of anti-blackness, and particularly anti-blackness that has black women and black children in the crosshairs.

M

Megan Goodwin 16:51

Yep, yep. And I think the thing that, one of the things that absolutely kills me about this is not just that people get it wrong so often, and they do, we don't teach this history. And that's, that's entirely why I'm writing the next book is because it costs us a lot to try to correct these records. I don't ever blame someone for not knowing this. The part where I get really stuck is when I provide them with historical context with all of the very well documented facts about what happened. And they still insist that they know better, that actually, it was suicide, actually, it is funny, actually, this is what they deserve for, I don't know, trying to make the world a better place and just trying to find a space where they could live and survive and flourish. The smugness and the conviction that like if you try to make things better, if you try to do religion different, in order to make things better, this is what you fucking get, and you deserve it. And it just, it makes me very, very angry and very, very sad. So let's let's all do better.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:58

Yeah, I think that for me, you've you've hit the nail on the head. I know history is not usually the place that you come home for being angry about or like for being passionate about. But I think for those of us who study or who know about micro-histories, we can see the triplicate violence, right? It's not just that this event happened. It's not just that it gets written out of history. It is also that whatever the kernel that came out of it, that has an afterlife, that is almost undefeatable. Right? Because like, drinking the Kool Aid, is part of the vocabulary of an American Zeitgeist for the last, what, 45 years, 50 years.

M

Megan Goodwin 18:48

44 on the nose because it happens eight months after I was born.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:51

And so like, as a historian that studies quite a lot of hateful activities. It's really hard when you see these four word or three words depending on how we're counting that hyphen. Trite signifiers for these horrific events, become jokes that are not yet a community trying to heal and represent itself with a little bit of tongue in cheek.

M

Megan Goodwin 19:25

Right right, that's the thing right....





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:27

Right. It's apathetic, where you're curling it at someone. And you're doing the violence and the violence is not just about mental illness, stigma and like how suicide is anyone's fault in the first place is like a separate set of issues and anti blackness and this event that gets taken wrong and anti religion because like, right, the assumption that if you do religion wrong, you deserve violence, but it's also like the erasure of any facts, which is why historians often describe themselves as like just feeling gaslit all the time.



Megan Goodwin 19:59

Yeah, yeah. Like there's a resentment about the fact. I have blocked folks, I considered colleagues on Twitter because they made light of this. And it is staggering to watch the ways that folks want to be dismissive of such a violent history. Like we were wrapping up but whatever tiny Primary Sources The reason that I wanted to write this is because yesterday I had a friend text me and say that on the their business Slack on the Slack for their job, someone had created a Kool Aid man emoji and the command that you type to get it to pop up is drinking the Kool Aid. And the person was like, I know this is bad because I read your Twitter, where can I send them?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:47

So here we are, you can send them right here.



Megan Goodwin 20:50

I'm gonna.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:52

Okay with that. Don't pack up. Nerds. You've got homework homework. Except, you know what, nerds? I don't have a lick of homework to give you this is 100% in Megan's court. So my homework is listen to the professor. Goodwin, tell us what you've got.



Megan Goodwin 21:10

Yes, I will. Yes. So the first place that I want to direct you is medium.com where I am slowly collecting resources around this new book project that I'm working on, which is called cults incorporated the business of bad religion. And the piece on there that I am the proudest of and that is the most relevant for today's conversation is the transcript of a keynote that I did at Fairfield University because friend of the pod, Lydia Wilkie-Cholo invited me to come it is called "Making the American Religious Monster". It has all of the citations in the whole world, lots of multimedia stuff, so go check that out. I also would be absolutely remiss not to speak the name of Cicchitto Hutchinson, who first drew my attention to the misogynoir of how we remember and misremember Jonestown, so she has pieces for both Religion Dispatches, and the African

American Intellectual History Society, both focused on why so many black women died at Jonestown that are just heartbreaking and deeply insightful. And then the last thing that I'll recommend on the pod but trust that there will be more on the website is the 2006 firelight documentary Jonestown Life and Death of People's Temple, which you can watch for free on YouTube. It is heartbreaking, but does a truly beautiful job of highlighting the vision and the dedication and the work so much work that went in to trying to build a better world. So high recommend on all of those.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:41

shout out to Evie Wolfe, Rachel Zieff and Juliana Finch the KI-101 team whose work make this pod accessible, and therefore awesome, listenable, social-media-able among many other things for which we are grateful.



Megan Goodwin 22:53

grateful we sure are. You can find Meghan that's me on Twitter at mpg PhD and Elise at pr o f IR M F or the show at keeping it underscore 101 Find the website at keeping it one on one.com Keep the ends to if you want to drop us a row and we're on Tik Tok. Now, apparently that's happening. Look at us being in the zeitgeist. Drop us a rating or review in your pod catcher of choice and with that,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:18

Peace out nerds do your homework.



Megan Goodwin 23:20

It's on the syllabus