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ATTORNEY CHARLES GARRY IS STILL A BELIEVER—IF NOT IN JIM JONES, THEN IN HIS 'UTOPIA'



The commune's two lawyers, Garry and Marfilano, talked camp members out of killing them, then fed to the feds.



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For nearly all his 69 years, lawyer Charles Garry has been a rebel with one cause or another. The son of Armenian immigrants, he worked his way through law school at night and was a Depression socialist who began his legal career defending militant trade unions. In the 1950s he represented alleged Communists before the House Un-American Activities Committee—and refused to answer questions himself: “I told them to kiss my ass.” Then for a decade he served as the embattled chief counsel for the Black Panthers, defending Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver with such a flair for courtroom dramatics that one policeman, under intense questioning, jumped from the witness stand and pulled his gun on Garry.

As a group, the Panthers were hardly easy to defend. But no client betrayed Garry so cruelly as did the Rev. Jim Jones; no case in the lawyer’s 40 years of practice came to such a catastrophic end. “I can’t put any sense to it,” he says. “I saw a place where there was no such thing as racism, sexism, elitism, ageism—utopia in action. Now those 914 people are dead, and that beautiful dream is destroyed.”

Garry played a special role in events leading up to Congressman Leo Ryan’s fatal visit. “I radioed Jim Jones from Georgetown,” he recalls, “and told him he had two alternatives: He could tell a U.S. congressman, the media and the concerned relatives they could go screw themselves, or he could let them come to Jonestown, to see what I had seen. ‘If you do that,’ I told him, ‘you will have a red-letter day.’” He still marvels at how tragically wrong he was.

Garry has represented Jones and the Peoples Temple since mid-1977, when they came under attack in the press and Jones fled to Guyana. Memphis attorney Mark Lane was also retained by the Temple in September, and though Garry was no great fan—“I have trouble working with him because he shoots off his mouth”—Lane’s presence in Jonestown may well have spared the two men from death. When Ryan’s party left for the airport in nearby Port Kaituma, where they were ambushed, the lawyers stayed behind. “I think Jones intended to have us shot,” says Garry, who was taken with

Lane to a guesthouse as Jones’ followers massed around the vat of poison. “Pretty soon two young men with guns at the ready came to us. They said they were ready to die and happy about it, because they were going to expose this racist, fascist society. Mark very quickly said, ‘Charles and I will write about you.’ I think that saved our lives. They said okay and hugged us. We bid them goodbye and left.”

Walking along the road at sundown, they spotted several men. “We freaked out and went into the jungle. By this time it was pitch-black, so we just dropped right where we were. We lay on the ground for 14 hours.”

Lane and Garry, who was dressed in suit pants, dress boots and a stocking cap to keep out mosquitoes, started their trek through the jungle again the next day in pouring rain, marking their path with strips torn from Lane’s underwear. “About 4 o’clock,” Garry says, “we were within a quarter mile of the guardhouse at the exit from Jonestown. Lane didn’t want me to check it out. He said, ‘You’d be endangering our lives!’ But I had no patience left and as a combat scout in World War II I knew how to get around without being seen. I picked up a big piece of timber—it must have been 15 feet long. I had been a javelin thrower in high school, and I told Mark, ‘If the guy inside has a weapon and attacks me, I will throw it at him and kill him.’ When I got up to the place it was empty. I called Mark to come, and from there we headed straight to Port Kaituma.”

Perhaps the greatest wonder of Garry’s story is that he has not ended his dealings with the Peoples Temple; he continues to represent the tenuously surviving faction in San Francisco and, however improbably, to praise Jim Jones’ vision. “He just flipped out,” explains Garry. “He was very sick. But I saw for myself what a beautiful place Jonestown was. It was filled with dedicated, hard-working people—not cultists or lunatics.” Like the hundreds who followed Jones to his grave, Garry apparently only saw what he was looking for. **DIANNA WAGGONER**

Garry holds the fatal roster of Jonestown. He says he warned Jim Jones in 1977: “Your paranoia is going to destroy you.”

Photograph by Michael Alexander



GARRY HAS GONZO defend Bobby Seale (above, with Kaituma Cleaver) at the Chicago trial, but Jones did not let him.

