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NO DAY PASSES without some new horrendous or baffling report from the country whose name has now become a synonym for sadness and revulsion. We are told that the slaughter can be traced to a custody fight over six-year-old John Victor Stoen, whose parents sought to reclaim him from the Jones cult—Mr. Jones evidently having regarded the potential loss of the child as a portent of the cult's disintegration. We also learn that the mass suicides were conceived of as collective "punishment" for the wrong-doings of defectors. We learn that there are survivors, some of whom may be murderers. We hear more stories of mad rituals. We read the comments of the stunned relatives of the dead. We learn that Mr. Jones had a mysterious letter on him. And throughout, we watch the body-count rise from 200 to 400 to twice that and, most recently, to 918, close enough to an even thousand to call it that.

We also learn something about ourselves. From the Charleston (South Carolina) News-Courier comes the point of view expressed by too many—that we had no business spending \$8 million in tax dollars to fly the dead cultists home for burial. "Millions of Americans will be left wondering why special treatment was accorded to so many religious zealots," said the News-Courier. The fact is that only proper and humane treatment was accorded to dead American citizens,

whose families and country are here. Bringing back the bodies was simply the first thing to be done.

What else is to be done? First, we must help the survivors and prosecute the killers. Then we must determine if there are fallen-away members of the Peoples Temple who are in danger and need to be protected. There must also be a thorough investigation of what exactly happened in Jonestown, something that sets out the confusion of details in as reasonable an order as possible. We must see if a State Department policy may be formulated at least to cover a similar contingency in the future. We must also recognize that a general policy may be impossible, that Jonestown was an aberration, and presented a situation in which, without benefit of hindsight, no rescue could ever have been carried out.

In other words there are processes to understand and set forth, and rules to follow—a society to keep intact.

We are going through a necessary and troubling period at the moment, a simultaneous fumbling for news and solace. Like the FBI, we are trying to identify the bodies, and to identify them in terms that make sense. What we have left, for better or worse, is civilization, the same civilization out of which Mr. Jones led his flock. Now we survive, to learn and clean up.