

## Margaret Singer Tape Collection

Margaret Thaler Singer (1921–2003) was a renowned expert in the subject of mind control. Trained as a clinical psychologist, with a Ph.D. from the University of Denver, she conducted research on troops who returned from the Korean War to determine the psychological stresses they had undergone. While she taught as an adjunct professor at the University of California, Berkeley, for many years, she primarily worked with families whose adult children were members of cults, that is, new religious movements. A board member of the American Family Foundation (now the International Cultic Studies Association), she testified at numerous civil trials brought against cults as to the presence of brainwashing to account for changes in behaviors and beliefs. Though she attempted to testify at the criminal trial of Patty Hearst in 1976—claiming that the newspaper heiress had been subjected to brainwashing in order to explain Hearst’s participation in armed bank robberies conducted by the Symbionese Liberation Army—the judge did not allow Singer’s defense. Singer outlined the steps of coercive persuasion (or thought reform) with co-author Janja Lalich in the book *Cults in Our Midst* (Jossey-Bass, 1995 and 2003).

Singer became interested in Peoples Temple shortly before the deaths in Jonestown in November 1978. She was asked to work with former members at the Human Freedom Center, an organization established to help people leave the Temple. The center’s offices in Berkeley became a hub of activity after Jonestown, with bereaved relatives, former members, and survivors of the tragedy gathering to share stories and get help.

Most of the tapes in the Margaret Singer collection comprise shortwave radio conversations between Peoples Temple members in Jonestown, Georgetown, and San Francisco. These tapes were made by members of the Concerned Relatives, an oppositional group that met informally in 1976 and became more organized in 1977. To understand these secret radio messages it will be helpful to have the “Peoples Temple Code Book” handy ([http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page\\_id=13221](http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=13221) ). There are also news broadcasts recounting activities and interviews of the Concerned Relatives, along with interviews with the founders of the Concerned Relatives, Al and Jeannie Mills. Of special note is Item 34, Singer Tape 20, in which Dr. Lowell Streiker, Director of the Human Freedom Center after Jonestown, is critically

discussed. For Dr. Streiker's side of things, see "Reflections on the Human Freedom Center," in *The Need for a Second Look at Jonestown*, ed. Rebecca Moore and Fielding McGehee III (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), pp. 150–164.

The Singer Tapes give insight into the inter-continental communications system between the U.S. and Guyana utilized by members of Peoples Temple. They also provide some glimpses of the Concerned Relatives through the group's telephone conversations and news broadcasts.

The tapes were donated by the estate of Margaret Singer.