

Archive for Twelve Tribes

04.17.06

1970s "cult" coming back to Chattanooga

Posted in Twelve Tribes at 1:29 pm by Rick Ross

The so-called "[Twelve Tribes](#)" a purported "cult" that began in Chattanooga, Tennessee, but moved away amidst much controversy more than twenty years ago, appears to be planning a comeback.



This group was known in Chattanooga through its business the "Yellow Deli" during the 1970s. And was led by former carnival barker turned "prophet," Elbert Eugene Spriggs, who reportedly now lives in Asheville, N.C.

Spriggs followers are spreading the word of their return through "reunion" announcements posted along with their own version of the Twelve Tribes Tennessee history through the [Web site Chattanooga.com](#).

The first reunion was yesterday on Easter Sunday from 2 to 10 PM.

Was this supposedly symbolic of their group's Tennessee "resurrection"?

The next reunion is scheduled for June 18, from 2 to 10 PM.

Former members of Twelve Tribes that consider the group a destructive "cult," have a Web site called "[Twelve Tribes-EX](#)." There is also a [discussion group](#) available through *Yahoo*.

Spriggs "dismissed the concerns of those who view the somewhat controversial church group as controlling and cultish," reported the Web site [Chattanooga.com](#).

'We are not a cult, we just had the misfortune of coming together during the time of [Jim Jones](#) and the mess in Guyana,' he said.

These gatherings are taking place within the Rose Garden at Warner Park. A public place located at the intersection of 3rd St. and Holtzclaw Ave. not far from the campus of the University of Tennessee and near an old group *1970s address*.



Twelve Tribes is planning to reopen its “Yellow Deli” in Chattanooga and has [launched a Web site](#).

In 1978 the elders of the group reportedly conceded that their church had an “authoritarian character” [reported the Chattanooga Times](#).

“They call us ‘brain washers.’ I guess we do wash brains,” an elder admitted speaking with Eddie Wiseman to a reporter in 1978. “We must because if we don’t there will be no changing in a person’s life,” he then rationalized.

Wiseman, a native of Chattanooga, has remained a powerful figure in the group along with his wife [Jeanne Swantko](#), its lawyer.

But Wiseman’s own son fled Twelve Tribes and later [told the Boston Herald](#) “growing up in there...things...just weren’t right.”

The *Herald* reported that Wiseman’s son was “abused, forced to work in factories, brainwashed and denied a normal childhood.”

Wiseman, 58, [told the Times](#) he plans to relocate to Chattanooga and help operate the new Yellow Deli.

Many other children have also fled the group and described its [brutal physical punishment](#) and mistreatment. Some minor [children were taken into hiding](#) by Twelve Tribes parents hoping to avoid court rulings regarding child custody, in some cases authorities later made arrests.

Twelve Tribes kids typically do not attend public schools and begin



working at an early age. Authorities in New York [fined the group](#) for child labor violations.

Twelve Tribes has also been frequently criticized for its racist teachings.

Spriggs has taught his followers that “Martin Luther King and others have been inspired by the evil one to have forced equality” (“[Unraveling the Races of Man](#)” 1988).

Spriggs once observed, “It is horrible that someone would rise up to abolish slavery. What a wonderful opportunity that blacks could be brought over here to be slaves so that they could be found worthy of the nations” (“[Cham and Servitude](#)” 1991).

The group has also been [called “anti-Jewish.”](#)

Twelve Tribes teaches that “‘Jews are hostile to all men’ except those in Messiah...they are contrary, antagonistic...opposite...opposing...against...opposed...obstinate...The Jews double fallen nature is inclined to be a reproach...to the Gentiles...” (“[Jews](#)” [August 1996](#)).

A new Web site has been launched called “[Twelve Tribes Teachings.com](#),” which includes the complete archives of the group’s in-house periodical *InterTribal* 1994–96. This archive offers a detailed record of Spriggs teachings in his own words and/or as related by his followers.

Spriggs also is known for his somewhat [strange, more obscure teachings](#) regarding such things as air conditioning, how to prepare and eat vegetables and about cheese.

“No cheese. Throw that hard cheese out. We don’t eat it. You can’t get a good Jew to eat it. It’s bad for your system. You have to get something else to compensate for it because it constipates you. Old hard cheeses are no good for you,” says Spriggs.

Since the group’s departure from Chattanooga after the sale of its properties in 1979 Twelve Tribes has accumulated millions of dollars in collective assets. The former carnival barker turned “prophet” controls a substantial financial empire, essentially built upon the backs of his followers.

Twelve Tribes members work hard running [coffee houses](#) for the group, and have labored putting together products for *Trader Joe’s*, *L.L. Bean*, [Estee Lauder](#) and at one time Robert Redford’s [Sundance Catalog](#).

Today Twelve Tribes appears to specialize in [buying run down properties](#) in upstate New York, and then using its considerable manpower for rehabilitation.

Also, new members often surrender their assets to the group.

CultNews has learned that [when members leave](#) they most often take virtually nothing, despite whatever gifts they may have given the group and many years of hard work.

Meanwhile [Spriggs lives in relative luxury](#), spending his time at various homes in the United States, France and Brazil, while many of his followers subsist modestly in group housing.

Whenever Twelve Tribes or its “prophet” has been criticized and/or scrutinized by anyone, this has frequently been characterized as “persecution.”

In their recent public postings group members claim that “prejudice” and “fear” led to them being “driven from Chattanooga” and compared that experience to the “Salem Witch Trials.”

Twelve Tribes members also say that Spriggs and his wife Marsha moved to New England much like the “brave Pilgrims...fleeing...for freedom of religion.”

Spriggs followers then blame everything on public officials and accept no meaningful responsibility for the group’s bad behavior

Now Twelve Tribes members “from Chattanooga are coming back.”

Will Spriggs triumphantly return to Tennessee as its rich prodigal “prophet”?

Will the town that takes such pride in its “bible belt” status be happy that a man often called a “heretic” is coming home?

“Coming back to Chattanooga is an opportunity for people to see who we are and what we turned out to be,” the Twelve Tribes “prophet” told *Chattanooga.com*.

Chattanooga, which seemed relieved to see Spriggs and his people leave, is probably not going to be glad to have them back.

[Permalink](#) [Comment](#)

02.02.04

New labor law may be legal loophole for “cults” to exploit kids

Posted in [Twelve Tribes](#) at 4:34 pm by Rick Ross

President Bush recently signed into law legislation specifically designed to benefit the Amish religious sect reports Pennsylvania’s [Daily Local News](#).

The new law will allow children as young as 14 to work within Amish family businesses in what is referred to as “apprenticeship” programs.

Previously such child labor was prohibited, and the Amish were fined for violations.

However, legislators that sponsored and supported this change in the law said it will allow the Amish to pursue their traditional and religious way of life.

“This is an issue of freedom of religion,” said Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter.

However, groups called “cults,” such as the “[Twelve Tribes](#),” have used religion as an excuse to work children in their own version of “apprenticeship” programs.

But unlike the Amish the Twelve Tribes have operated what can be seen as “sweatshops,” historically using kids to produce or package products under negotiated [contracts with outside companies](#).

The controversial group led by [Elbert Eugene Spriggs](#), a former carnival barker turned self-proclaimed “super apostle,” is also known for its [anti-Semitic tracts](#) and [racism](#).

The Twelve Tribes was exposed and [fined for child labor violations](#) in 2001.

Spriggs and his followers, not to mention other “cults,” may see the new legislation passed to benefit the benign Amish as a windfall for their not so traditional business concerns.

The new labor law may become little more than a legal loophole used by “cults” to exploit children.

[Permalink](#)[Comments](#)

01.08.04

Kids in cults

Posted in [Twelve Tribes](#), [Word of Faith Fellowship](#), [Nuwaubians](#), [Waco Davidians](#), [Children of God](#), [Church of God Restoration](#), [Brainwashing](#) at 11:47 am by Rick Ross

Nuwaubian “cult leader” and apparent pedophile predator [Dwight “Malachi” York](#) is facing judge and jury in what appears to be the beginning of the final chapter of his sordid life.

York is accused of sexually abusing minor children, through hundreds of criminal counts.

One witness told jurors yesterday how the self-proclaimed “Imperial Grand Potentate,” now known as “Chief Black Thunderbird Eagle,” regularly molested her beginning at the age of 8 reports the [*Athens Banner-Herald*](#).

The “cult leader” allegedly created a contingent of child sex-slaves, and at least 13 of his purported victims have come forward as potential witnesses reports [*Associated Press*](#).

These minor children reportedly often went hungry and struggled in substandard living conditions while the “cult leader” led a lifestyle of luxury, as a seemingly absolute ruler.

Hopefully, the York case will focus needed attention on the issue of the plight of children within destructive cults.

Kids in cults are most often brought into such groups like so much baggage when parents join. They have no choice, and are instead dependent upon their family to make choices for them. Subsequently, they may suffer whatever hardships and/or abuse is meted out by a cult, often with no meaningful protection.

The safeguards and advocacy, which are usually readily available to mainstream kids through concerned parents, schools, neighbors or child protection services, are not typically accessible to minors housed within cult compounds.

Cult parents typically rely upon their leader’s value judgements, whatever the leader says is right is right and whatever the leader says is wrong is wrong.

Morality may become situational and essentially subject to the whims of someone like York.

Historically, in many cults parents have actually cooperated in the harm done to their own children, through medical neglect, brutal physical punishment and at times sexual abuse.

Reports of child abuse and/or endangerment has surfaced repeatedly in groups such as the [*Waco Davidians*](#), [*Children of God*](#), [*Word of Faith Fellowship*](#), The [*Church of God Restoration*](#) and the so-called “[*Twelve Tribes*](#),” just to name a few.

Courts have increasingly ruled that parental prerogatives do not include doing anything in the name of religion.

Most of York’s followers remain faithful despite the horrible crimes he is accused of, even though the “cult leader” confessed in a [*plea agreement*](#), which was ultimately rejected.

The judge apparently felt 15 years was not enough prison time for the admitted child molester.

York's devotees prefer to see his criminal prosecution as "persecution," the end result of a conspiracy concocted by law-enforcement together with disgruntled former members. And some have said York's confession was the result of "torture."

Such bizarre claims do seem to indicate that the Nuwaubians, like other "cult" members reported about in the past, are deeply "[brainwashed](#)." Perhaps they are so personally invested in the mythology York created and have sacrificed so much; they are unable to move on.

Sadly, the children of this faithful remnant remain prisoners of the "cult" until their parents break free from the mental and emotional bondage wrought by York.

The Nuwaubian leader will likely end his life in prison. But despite that punishment, nothing can restore the innocence of the children he victimized.

[Permalink](#)[Comments](#)

08.04.03

"Cult" selling its wares on eBay

Posted in [Twelve Tribes](#) at 2:45 pm by Rick Ross

The [Twelve Tribes](#) is a notorious racist and [anti-Semitic "cult"](#) that has been fined for [child labor violations](#) and accused repeatedly of [gross abuse](#).

The group often raises money by selling products made by its members. Once such goods were sold through [Robert Redford's Sundance Catalog](#).

However, public exposure of such connections put an end to all that.

But it seems you just can't keep a bad "cult" down.

In an effort to make the cash flow once again, Twelve Tribes has taken its products to the Internet and is hawking its manufactured goods through [eBay](#).

It lists items for sale under an assortment of names such as "Common Blacksmith," "The Mate Factor Yerba Mate," "Common wealth Wood Works," "The Common Thread, Common Sense Natural Bodycare," "elad" (baby clothing) and the "Common Ground Caf[☞]."

Listings have been up on eBay under the user ID "*beesinahive*."

The "beekeeper" of these worker drones is Twelve Tribes leader [Elbert Eugene Spriggs](#), a former carnival barker who now calls himself "Yoneq."

And “Yoneq” seems to have harvested quite a bit of honey.

Spriggs lives a relative [life of luxury](#), while his workers buzz around within [group housing](#), largely in quaint upstate New York towns like Coxsackie.

And though former corporate friends have snubbed the “cult” the Twelve Tribes still [brags about them](#).

“We used to manufacture very nice Pilgrim Primitive furniture..., which appeared in Robert Redford’s Sundance, Faith Mountain, and Spiegel Catalogs,” states their website.

The same site offers somewhat cryptically, “Our business ended suddenly and left us with extra inventory which we are offering for auction.”

That auction venue now often seems to be *eBay*.

Just think, you too can help Mr. Spriggs with the upkeep of his homes in France, New England and South America.

Of course this may require not thinking about the working conditions and hardships [endured by his followers](#).

PermalinkComments

06.23.03

Have some news reporters become cult apologists or stooges?

Posted in Twelve Tribes, Scientology, Jonestown, Cult Apologist?, Ananda Church of Self-Realization at 5:52 pm by Rick Ross

Some journalists write hard-hitting news stories about destructive cults, which have often led to further action. They expose wrongdoing and the authorities often follow-up through criminal prosecution or some other enforcement action.

However, there are those reporters who seem to be more interested in presenting a pretty picture for their community, than exposing the truth about cults.

Three recent stories about well-known groups often called “cults,” expose what looks like a penchant for puff pieces. This is a term used to describe uncritical articles that are more positive spin and/or froth than substance.

In such puffery reporters largely let the “cult” tell the story, without asking anything really tough, or follow-up questions.

Here are some recent examples that seem to fit into the category of “puff piece” if not cult apology.

A recent story written about the notorious group “[Ananda Marga](#),” which has been accused of violent crimes, child abuse and linked to suicide, described members as “covered in a life of peace.”

The journalist did ask a member about the “C” word (cult) though.

A devotee answered evasively, “You won’t lose your mind and be brainwashed.” And according to another member they are “not a religion.”

Right.

I guess that resolves everything, well at least the reporter seems to think so at the Kingston [Jamaica Gleaner](#).

However, P.R. Sarkar the founder and “God-Man” of Ananda Marga who died in 1990 did some time in an Indian prison. And that government felt he was important enough to publish a book about his group titled, *Ananda Marga: Soiling the Saffron Robe*.

This was not a “puff piece” and Sarkar comes off as little more than a “sociopath,” hardly “covered in a life of peace.” And not apparently respected by [Hindus](#).

The next journalist to offer up what amounts to cult apologies works in Ithaca, New York. This time the group is the “Twelve Tribes,” a racist anti-Semitic “cult” led by Elbert Eugene Spriggs, a former carnival barker.

The [Twelve Tribes](#) has a horrific history of child abuse, terrible custody battles, kidnappings and harsh exploitation, which rivals some of the worst “cults” in America.

In numerous news reports former members have [spoken out about the abuse](#) they endured under Spriggs harsh totalitarian rule.

But the leader they now call “Yoneq” [lives in luxury](#), travelling between his homes in France, the United States and South America.

Forget about all this.

The reporter for the [Ithaca Times](#) says the Twelve Tribes are a “unorthodox religious group...that worships Jesus.”

Right. Didn't [Jim Jones](#) make that claim?

“And they have now chosen Ithaca as their newest community,” the reporter happily adds.

The upstate New York journalist then essentially dismisses virtually every allegation against the Twelve Tribes offering readers instead their version of events.

No former member is quoted, no other opinions offered except, “Much of the content found on the Web can be described as derogatory.”

Is this in-depth journalism?

The article reads almost like an infomercial with a plug for the group's website at the end.

Such positive spin for “cults” is not limited to America. “Down under” an Australian journalist seems to be plugging away for [Scientology](#).

This [Sydney Morning Herald](#) reporter tells us the story of Hindu boy named Raja who found happiness at the Athena School in Sydney run by Scientologists.

There is nothing said about the troubled history of this controversial church, that Time Magazine named the “[Cult of Greed](#).”

Instead readers are regaled with how happy the little boy is at his new school, which teaches from text originated by L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology's founder.

This Australian article puffs on almost like an ad campaign, complete with a price quote per school term and a mention for a booklet by Hubbard called *The Way to Happiness*.

However, [Lisa McPherson](#) didn't seem to find her “way to happiness” and instead died after a breakdown, while under the care of her friends at Scientology.

Somehow the Sydney reporter didn't bother to include that little titbit.

Certainly these articles will not be nominated for Pulitzers.

Instead of reflecting professional journalism at its best these reporters seem to be treading down a different path.

They didn't do their research and/or chose to ignore it.

Their motto appears to be; Make nice, be happy and ignore reality.

Maybe that is "*The Way to Happiness*"?

But cults have a nasty way of getting headlines, through bad behavior and shattered lives. And eventually that cannot be ignored, even in Ithaca, Kingston or Sydney.

PermalinkComments

05.02.03

Racist "cult" becomes Cornell's new neighbor

Posted in [Twelve Tribes](#) at 12:24 pm by Rick Ross

Ithaca, New York is largely known as the site of Cornell University. But now this college town in upstate New York may be known for more than that.

A notorious "cult" called the "[Twelve Tribes](#)," led by [racist and anti-Semite](#) Elbert Spriggs, is buying up property in Ithaca, reports the [Cornell Daily](#).

The group, which numbers about 3,000, has been buying up storefronts and houses [in small towns](#) for years. They seem to especially like upstate New York, due to its rather depressed real estate market and comparatively low prices.

Twelve Tribes is known for its "[coffee houses](#)," which seem to afford the group recruitment opportunities. They are now opening and/or operating such businesses in Ithaca.

Spriggs controls a chain of such cafes, along with workshops and assorted businesses, which benefit from very low labor costs.

Generally, the [members of Twelve Tribes](#) work for little more than room and board and receive no conventional benefits such as medical insurance.

Now the "cult" also known for its [child beating practices](#), has apparently decided to raise its profile and profits in Ithaca.

No doubt Spriggs and his disciples also realize that recruitment opportunities within a college town are substantial. They have recently bought a building right near the Cornell campus.

Colleges have traditionally been the focus of intense “cult” recruitment efforts over the years. And the Twelve Tribes initially drew upon that population heavily during its [early days](#) in the 1970s.

In recent years Spriggs and his followers has become drawn increasing attention due to [child labor violations](#), law enforcement investigations regarding [missing children](#) and Spriggs relatively [luxurious lifestyle](#).

But in an apparent effort to keep costs down regarding group housing [Spriggs once said](#), “Is air-conditioning necessary...is the Holy of Holies air conditioned?...Breathing the same air continually is deadly.”

However, one of Spriggs residences in New England apparently is air-conditioned.

Parents of students and college officials at Cornell may soon find that “breathing the same air continually” with the Twelve Tribes in Ithaca, though not “deadly” may become increasingly uncomfortable.

[Permalink](#)[Comments](#)

04.29.03

“Twelve Tribes” news report misleading

Posted in [Twelve Tribes](#) at 12:49 pm by Rick Ross

A news report posted yesterday about the so-called “[Twelve Tribes](#)” contained misinformation.

According to Vermont’s [WVNY TV report](#) the group was cleared of child abuse charges after a raid in 1984.

However, this conclusion is incorrect.

Contrary to the report “[evidence of abuse](#)” was found within the “cult” compound. Police collected piles of wooden balloon sticks or switches, which had been dipped in resin for hardening and routinely used by “cult” members to beat their children.

But a Vermont judge ruled that that the raid and search of the compound was done illegally. And therefore any evidence gathered through that police action became inadmissible.

However, children taken from the compound by authorities in 1984 never underwent any professional evaluation and/or physical examination regarding abuse. And without such a

process there was no way for authorities to say that they “found no evidence of abuse,” as stated within the WVNY report.

In fact, former [childhood members](#) of Twelve Tribes have repeatedly stated that the group is abusive.

One prominent leader, [Eddie Weisman](#), was once arrested for the brutal beating of a minor child. Those charges were later dropped, because the girl refused to testify as a witness.

WVNY correctly notes that Twelve Tribes has been fined for violating [child labor laws](#) in New York.

A group member in the report cryptically said, “We believe that this is the truth. We believe that this is the only way that people can really be fulfilled.”

Former carnival barker Elbert Spriggs, a self-proclaimed “apostle,” who now calls himself “Yoneq,” leads the group.

He has [stated more succinctly](#), “We are the light and hope of the world. We are the only ones who can reclaim this earth for its Maker...All other attempts to do so are not merely futile, they are evil.”

Spriggs is both a [racist and anti-Semite](#).

While his followers live humbly, [Spriggs has residences](#) in France, South America and a luxurious home in New England.

WVNY reports, “The group is bigger than ever, with 3,000 members around the world.”

This statement appears correct, but the [reports of abuse](#) and exploitation have never abated.

[Permalink](#)[Comments](#)

01.08.03

Newsweek quotes “cult lover” as expert on Raelians

Posted in [Scientology](#), [Twelve Tribes](#), [Raelians](#), [Paranormal](#), [Hare Krishnas](#), [Cult Apologist?](#) at 10:21 am by Rick Ross

First the Raelians hand picked Michael Guillen as their “expert” to coordinate DNA testing, which would supposedly prove their cloning claims. Later, [Guillen was exposed](#) as Clonaid CEO and Raelian bishop Brigitte Boisselier’s “friend.”

Skeptics see Guillen as largely an apologist for paranormal claims. He received a “Pigasus” award (“when pigs fly”) from noted debunker James Randi.

Have the Raelians found another friendly “expert”?

Newsweek recently quoted Susan Palmer, a professor at Dawson College in Montreal and the author of a forthcoming book on the Raelians, in an article about the “cult” called “[Spaced Out](#).”

Palmer described Claude Vorilhon or “Rael,” founder and leader of the Raelians, as a “a playboy and a sportsman and a social satirist.” And she characterized the group as “benign.”

Palmer is also the author of an article which appeared in the Montreal Gazette titled “[No sects – please we’re French](#).” She essentially attacked the French effort to identify and monitor destructive cults. Palmer prefers the politically correct term “new religious movements” (NRMs).

According to Palmer the “[Moonies](#),” [Scientologists](#), [Hare Krishnas](#) and of course the [Raelians](#), are all NRMs. She likes to take her college students on “field trips” to the Hare Krishna temple and to witness Raelian baptisms.

Palmer admits, “If I were a French sociologist...I would be out of a job. I would be called a ‘cult lover.’”

Palmer also has defended an anti-Semitic cult group called the “[Twelve Tribes](#),” which was fined for child [labor violations](#) in New York and has been the focus of frequent allegations regarding [child abuse](#).

Professor Palmer appears to be more of a [cult apologist](#) than an objective observer or “expert.”

Serious questions have been raised about the research of academics like Palmer.

[Benjamin Zablocki](#) a professor of sociology at Rutgers University lamented, “The sociology of religion can no longer avoid the unpleasant ethical question of how to deal with the large sums of money being pumped into the field by the religious groups being studied...in the form of subvention of research expenses, subvention of publications, opportunities to sponsor and attend conferences, or direct fees for services, this money is not insignificant, and its influence on research findings and positions taken on scholarly disputes is largely unknown. This is an issue that is slowly but surely building toward a public scandal.”

How has Professor Palmer's Raelian research and coming book been funded and/or supported? And what fees, money, expenses and/or sponsorships has she received from groups called "cults"?

Maybe James Randi should consider Susan Palmer for a "Pigasmus"?

[Permalink](#)[Comments](#)

12.22.02

"Cults" go "Phishing"

Posted in [Twelve Tribes](#), [Hare Krishnas](#), [Cult Following](#) at 9:32 am by Rick Ross

Since the death of Jerry Garcia in 1995 another band called the Phish seems to have filled the void left behind by the Grateful Dead.

The cult following known as the "Dead heads" that once wandered nomadically from concert to concert devoted to Garcia's band have been replaced by the "Phish heads."

Phish concerts are typically [sold out](#) far in advance due largely to the phenomenon of their cult following.

For many fans the Phish have taken on an importance usually reserved for religious devotion. Chris Hedges mines this mystery in his article "A Quest for Rapture Leads a 'Phish Head' Astray," recently run in the [New York Times](#).

But one aspect of both the Grateful Dead and "Phish head" phenomenon that has not been reported about is the often well-organized effort by groups called "cults" to recruit amongst the rock bands faithful.

Recognizing the vulnerability of nomadic youth searching for meaning some "cults" seem to think proselytizing at concerts is like "shooting fish in a barrel."

Or is that "Phish heads" in a barrel?

Some groups called "cults" that once followed the Dead and/or now go Phishing are [Krishna](#), [Twelve Tribes](#) and the [Chabbad Lubavitch](#).

So as "Phish heads" continue to follow their beloved band, some might ultimately be caught by another group altogether.

One concert might just be the last for some unlucky "Phish heads," unless they are later sent out to go Phishing too.

11.13.02

Cult influence growing?

Posted in Terrorists, Twelve Tribes, Moonies / Unification Church, Scientology, Al Qaeda, Fellowship of Friends, International Church of Christ, Jonestown, Aum Sect at 2:29 pm by Rick Ross

Many experts have noted that not only has the number of groups called “cults” has grown substantially in the past twenty years, they have also gained considerable momentum and influence within the United States.

A [featured presentation](#) about destructive cults at the 2002 annual convention for the American Psychological Association (APA) drew this comment from its President Dr. Philip G. Zimbardo, “When some organizations that promote religious or self-growth agendas become rich enough to wield power to suppress media exposés, influence legal judgments or publicly defame psychology, how can they be challenged?”

Zimbardo observations were published within the [APA’s Monitor](#).

Groups that have often been called “cults” such as [Scientology](#) and Rev. Moon’s [Unification Church](#) have in fact become “rich enough” to “wield the power” Zimbardo talks about. Within the United States and internationally these two “cults” alone control billions of dollars.

Scientology and the Unification Church have acquired political power that reaches all the way to the White House. This was demonstrated by Scientology’s unprecedented access during the [Clinton Administration](#) and the special relationship Rev. Moon has with the [Bush Family](#).

It remains to be seen how Moon’s influence may impact the so-called “[Faith Based Initiative](#)” proposed by President George W. Bush, which would fund religious programs with government money.

Rev. Moon’s influence on Capital Hill cannot be denied. He has become part of its establishment, largely through control of the [Washington Times](#). And Moon also courts [religious](#) and [political](#) leaders through banquets, celebrations and conferences, which are well attended.

Groups like Scientology and the Unification Church also have funded efforts to “suppress media” and “influence legal judgements.”

Scientology has arguably turned litigation into something of a religious rite.

Time Magazine published the cover story, "[Scientology: The Cult of Greed](#)," and was promptly sued for \$400 million dollars. Even though [Scientology lost](#), the litigation cost Time millions of dollars and took years to resolve. This produced a substantial chilling effect within the media, which served to suppress stories about the controversial church in the United States.

Likewise, Scientology has made a point of going after its critics personally. This has included [defamation](#), [libel](#) and [personal injury](#). The net result is that many that might expose the group don't—due it seems largely to fear.

The Unification Church has frequently funded efforts to "influence legal judgements." Notably an ongoing campaign through academic surrogates to discredit research about cults.

Some years ago the APA itself became involved through the filing of a "[friend of the court brief](#)." That brief effectively would have helped the Unification Church in its defense regarding a personal injury lawsuit filed by a former member. However, the brief was later [withdrawn](#).

Dr. Dick Anthony was the psychologist largely responsible for that effort. Anthony continues to work for groups called "cults" and is paid \$3,500 per day for his efforts. One of his employers is Scientology, which also [recommends him](#), through a front organization called the "reformed [Cult Awareness Network](#)."

Defenders of "cults" such as Anthony are anxious to disprove the "[theory of mind control](#)."

However, Zimbardo has acknowledged the existence of mind control. He stated, "Mind control is the process by which individual or collective freedom of choice and action is compromised by agents or agencies that modify or distort perception, motivation, affect, cognition and/or behavioral outcomes."

But how does this ultimately affect the general public?

In a survey done in 1980 by Zimbardo of more than 1,000 high school students in the San Francisco Bay area 54% reported a cult had attempted to recruit them and 40% said they had experienced multiple attempts.

Certainly on college campuses groups like the "[International Church of Christ](#)" (ICC), which has often been called a "cult," are very active. The ICC has been [banned by many colleges and universities](#), due largely to its aggressive recruitment practices.

And cults are not restricted exclusively to large metropolitan areas or schools. They are increasingly active in small towns and rural areas. In some situations groups called “cults” eventually exercise considerable influence within the small communities they inhabit.

A recent example is the “[Fellowship of Friends](#),” which has been called a “cult.” The group led by Robert Burton has a troubled history in [Yuba County](#), a rural area in California. Likewise the group known as the “[Twelve Tribes](#)” has moved into [small towns](#) in upstate New York.

The parallels between cults and terrorist groups cannot be ignored.

A charismatic and totalitarian leader who supposedly speaks for God dominates many terrorist groups, not unlike destructive cults.

What is the difference ultimately then, between suicide at [Jonestown](#) and the suicide bombers of [al-Qaeda](#)?

Each group had devoted followers willing to die for its cause. Jim Jones called this an act of “revolutionary suicide,” Osama bin-Laden said it was “Jihad.” But in the end the mindset is the same.

In the end the only practical difference between bin Laden and Jim Jones is the level of destruction wrought by their madness. The group dynamics that produce the tragedy are essentially the same.

Zimbardo concluded, “Understanding the dynamics and pervasiveness of situational power is essential to learning how to resist it and to weaken the dominance of the many agents of mind control who ply their trade daily on all of us behind many faces and fronts.”

It seems that “mind control” has become a modern mental health hazard. However, this illness unlike others, can potentially affect more than the personal lives of individuals.