

Rajneeshpuram: the Commune That Changed Religious Freedom

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Project choice Website

Website Student Composed Words: 1200

Process Paper Words: 500

Choosing our topic

When starting our NHD project this year, our first struggle was selecting our topic. The two options that stuck out to us the most were cults and retro video games. However, after discussion, we both agreed that a project on cults was more interesting. Sadly that didn't narrow down what cult to focus on. After getting a recommendation from our teacher, we decided that the Rajneesh would be a perfect fit since they were geographically close. The Rajneesh weren't one of the more well-known cults, so it was kind of like a diamond in the rough. We also felt that the crimes they committed and the *rights* that were changed because of them were ideal for the theme of *rights and responsibilities*.

Researching

At the start of our project, we recorded potential resources in a big Google document in case it was needed. This was very helpful later on as it gave us a wide variety of information, but also made it harder to sort through what was useful and what wasn't. After we finally decided to do our project on Rajneesh specifically, we did more focused research, making sure to get a wide variety of official documents about the court cases, documents about the effects of cults on the mind, as well as websites about the cult.

Making our project

We had one member who had already competed with a website last year so they were in charge of building the website for the most part since they knew the platform best. One thing that was very important to our group was managing workflow and dividing up the work writing our bibliography, process paper, and the text for our website.

Historical argument

In the 1970s and 1980s, cults were a common aspect of American life and religion, yet not as prevalent today, and the Rajneesh are part of that reason. The Rajneesh commune is an example of how cults are viewed; they are found abnormal and often considered to be illegal. When someone mentions a cult, often the first thing that comes to mind is its negative aspects. In reality, cults are not illegal, and only their actions violate laws that raise suspicions. The creation of cults was an important event that influenced the *right* for cults to exist today.

Topic significance

Charismatic cult leaders and their cults are still found in the United States. Leaders make joining sound like the deal of a lifetime. Yet, as the adage says, if something is too good to be true, it probably is. Usage of critical thinking skills continue to be vital as the issues surrounding misinformation and following others continue to be widespread. Learning to think for oneself can lead to making better choices in the long run. The Rashneesh cult is an excellent reminder of this hazardous situation. Tens of thousands of people fell for Osho's manipulation, thinking themselves too smart to fall victim to these schemes, even though it was aimed at the more intelligent.