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## Pilgrims' Progress

"Efficient America," "Spiritual India," and America's Transnational Religious Imagination

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines how the missionary work of Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), promised to advance the American way of life while re-affirming the traditional and authentic nature of his message. Drawing on Yogananda's writing and the SRF's in-house publication, this cultural history contextualizes Yogananda's career within processes of decolonization, America's deepening economic and political connections to the developing world, and consumer-driven shifts in the religious marketplace. Yogananda's message provided a means for managing difference while seeking to forge greater sentimental, cultural, and commercial connections between the United States and India. His career offers insights into how American "exceptionalism" met the challenges of global cultural exchange amid geopolitical imaginaries of the nation's burgeoning empire. **KEYWORDS** Yoga movement, Paramahansa Yogananda, American spiritualism, Self-Realization Fellowship, Cold War, U.S. empire

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In his 1946 autobiography, Paramahansa Yogananda, an Indian yogi and charismatic guru, offered insights into the path to world progress. Yogananda described how his organization, the Los Angeles-based Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), had established an exemplary "world civilization," defined by a multicultural synthesis located somewhere between what he called "efficient America and spiritual India." Beyond that lofty goal, *Autobiography of a Yogi* also focused on the individual's spiritual progress, including advice for those seeking greater mental acuity and focus. "Intuition," Yogananda wrote, "is soul guidance, appearing naturally in man during those instants when his mind is calm."<sup>1</sup> Over time, Yogananda's teachings, and the allure of

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1. *Autobiography of a Yogi* has sold over four million copies and entered its thirteenth edition in 2012. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1946), 159, 480.

“a mystical, otherworldly India,” attracted followers who sought to pair spiritual and material progress.<sup>2</sup> The values expounded in the text complemented the emergence of “new age capitalism” at the turn of the twenty-first century in the Silicon Valley, where entrepreneurs often wed Eastern spirituality and health practices with contemporary business acumen.<sup>3</sup>

Yogananda’s work reveals the consequences of the deepening of American experimentation with non-Western religions that, while providing an influx of new beliefs, nevertheless obscured the quasi-colonial power dynamic inherent in these encounters. Yogananda offered an interesting bridge between Indian spirituality and American business. He spent nearly three decades synthesizing the spiritual elements of *kriya*, a meditation-based form of yoga, with liberal Christianity for American audiences. He also worked throughout his career to frame Indian spirituality as a complement to American business acumen. The result was a pursuit of spirituality that provided a means to self-improvement that could be, at the same time, turned toward individual material ends.

Drawing on the writing of Yogananda and *Self-Realization Magazine*, the in-house publication of the organization, this article examines how Yogananda’s missionary work promised to advance the American way of life while reaffirming the traditional and authentic nature of his message. In particular, this cultural history contextualizes Yogananda’s career within processes of decolonization, America’s deepening economic and political connections to the developing world, and consumer-driven shifts in the American religious marketplace. Through the figure of Yogananda—one of many U.S.-based Indian gurus of the twentieth century—we can see how, within transnational networks of ideas, “seemingly binary poles” often worked not as opposites, but as what historian Emily Rosenberg calls “nested complements that operated in creative tension with each other.”<sup>4</sup> Yogananda provided a means for managing difference—wherein Indian “spiritual science” provided a balance

2. Joseph S. Alter, “Yoga, Bodybuilding, and Wrestling: Metaphysical Fitness,” in Debra Diamond, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation* (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2013), 85.

3. The devotees of *Autobiography of a Yogi* included Apple’s CEO Steve Jobs, who arranged, in advance of his death, to give away copies of Yogananda’s book at his October 2011 memorial. Kimberly Lau, *New Age Capitalism: Making Money East of Eden* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 11. See also Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge and Francis, 2005).

4. Emily Rosenberg, “Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World,” in *A World Connecting 1870–1945*, ed. Emily Rosenberg (Cambridge: Harvard Belknap, 2012), 821.

with American “material science”—while seeking to forge greater sentimental, cultural, and commercial connections between the nations. Yogananda’s career thus offers insights into how American “exceptionalism” met the challenges of global cultural exchange amid the geopolitical imaginaries of the nation’s burgeoning empire.

Over the course of the twentieth century, changes in American religious beliefs coincided with socioeconomic transformations that produced new understandings of the liberal subject. During this process, understandings of authority shifted from “without” to “within” and from external sources to personal instinct. Scholars see overlapping sites of authority competing for primacy—including organized religion but also science, nature, and the state—that informed the “marketplace of religion” in the United States.<sup>5</sup> The discursive division between formal religion and spirituality captures the shifting boundaries of authority. Whereas the term *religion* increasingly meant “institutional religious belief and practice,” the term *spiritual*—often linked with non-Western practices—came to connote a connection to moral values and religious experiences as well as an understanding of one’s place in the world.<sup>6</sup> The popularity of the term *spiritual* reflected in this period the increasing desire for a flexible understanding of belief based on individual preference.<sup>7</sup> While empowering the practitioner, the language of “spirituality” also diffused into other spheres of American life, including emerging consumer capitalist lifestyles and practices such as yoga, which transitioned from the margins to the mainstream.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the term’s association with individual choices aligned it more directly to the proliferating discourses of “self-improvement” in late capitalism: “the freedom to govern oneself, to make individual and privatized choices, and to release oneself from a dependency on the state.”<sup>9</sup>

5. Paul Heelas, “Introduction: Detraditionalization and Its Rivals,” in *Detraditionalizations: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, eds. P. Heelas, S. Laash, and P. Morris (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), quoted in James Proctor, “Religion as Trust in Authority: Theocracy and Ecology in the United States,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 1 (2006): 189.

6. Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 3.

7. Anna S. King, “Spirituality: Transformation and Metamorphosis,” *Religion* 26 (1996): 345.

8. Andrea Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43–46.

9. Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 176.

Global exchanges informed the development of this American transnational religious and spiritual imagination. The history of “civil religion” in the United States suggests that the emergence of multiculturalism among liberals included the borrowing of religious wisdom from a multitude of traditions.<sup>10</sup> Scholars have singled out Southern California in particular for its rich history of global encounters, its lack of a religious establishment, its modernity, and the fluidity of identities and concluded that these factors contributed to a culture of “openness and acceptance.”<sup>11</sup> Yet the pluralist thesis fails to account for the ideological work that religious pluralism does in an uneven global economic structure of exchange that valorizes individual spiritual and secular expression through choice, while masking, continuing, and often deepening histories of expropriation, colonialism, and conquest. For this reason, this article investigates the way that the American religious imagination articulated and nurtured transnational attachments that “pulsed above, below, and through the more formalized structures of national states, empires, and international institutions,” as the United States developed a more formal global hegemony beginning in the early twentieth century. Although participants in transnational networks purported to advance universalism in opposition to the particularism of nation states and empires, their presumptions also drew upon implicit racial and imperial understandings of superiority. The religious transnationalism of the early twentieth century sought to navigate between universal and particular traditions and claims; indeed, Yogananda excelled at reconciling these types of “differentiated commonalities.”<sup>12</sup> We must, however, also examine how shifting historical contexts and imperatives altered the claims and how ideas that in one era articulated universal concepts in the longer term became wedded to dominant power structures.

Yogananda’s civilizational imaginary exemplifies a broader trajectory of American orientalism that unfolded within American religious culture over the course of the postwar era. Modern yoga emerged from a long history of transnational exchanges rather than a transplantation of an “authentic”

10. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 1115–17. For more on spiritual assemblage, see Robert Bellah and Richard Madsen, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

11. Wade Clark Roof, “Pluralism as a Culture: Religion and Civility in Southern California,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 612 (July 2007): 82.

12. Rosenberg, “Transnational Currents,” 849, 868.

process from one culture to another.<sup>13</sup> American orientalism, according to critic Vijay Prashad, associated “American” as “practical” and “worthy” in contrast to Indian values of “spiritual” and “ethereal”; Swami Vivekananda, one of the first Indian-born gurus to come to the United States and the founder of the Vedanta Society, outlined the parameters of this dynamic when, at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, he critiqued the West’s materialism by noting, “You of the West are practical in business, practical in great inventions, but we of the East are practical in religion. You make commerce your business; we make religion our business.”<sup>14</sup> Yogananda, in popularizing his system of *kriya* yoga, presented similar assurances to Americans as a means to assuage concerns about their modern condition. Both Vivekananda and Yogananda exemplify early instances of what scholar Srinivas Aravamudan characterizes as “Guru English,” which, while asserting South Asian spiritual superiority in the face of imperialism and the possibility of a positive East-West encounter, also came to signify a “commodifiable cosmopolitanism” accessible in the marketplace.<sup>15</sup>

Ideas morph over time and cannot be confined within any “original” cultural sphere; we can, however, historicize the ways that ideas became affixed to hegemonic structures.<sup>16</sup> This article interrogates one such trajectory, which eventually allowed “new age capitalism” to connect the value of spirituality to technological and entrepreneurial innovation. The material benefits of “spirituality” thus represented continuity, not change, in the desire to capitalize on, as Prashad has said, the “karma of brown folk.”<sup>17</sup>

## YOGANANDA’S CIVILIZATIONAL MISSION

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, international conferences played an important role in the development of “cultural internationalism” that sought to foster cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Although political and economic organizations tended to exclude non-Western entities, religious and cultural symposia allowed

13. Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 160–61.

14. Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), x; Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966), 135 as quoted in Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 35.

15. Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7, 10.

16. *Ibid.*, 220.

17. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*.

colonized participants from places like India to articulate their vision of “civilization” to the international community and, at times, create “global solidarity among anticolonial movements.”<sup>18</sup> Cultural internationalism became more inclusive after the devastation caused by the First World War, as a “new cosmopolitanism” embraced “the whole of humanity” and worked in tandem with concepts of civilizational and national character.<sup>19</sup>

Yogananda arrived in the United States in 1920 for the International Congress of Religious Liberals, after which he embarked on a three-decade-long missionary career in the United States. He made claims regarding the universal truth of scientific knowledge while also asserting that particular civilizations had specialized in certain areas. As he explained in an early issue of *East-West* (later *Self-Realization*) magazine, his organization sought to present “the different good traits of Eastern and Western life in general” and to concentrate on the “universal principles for making life more beautiful,” thereby minimizing “our minor differences.”<sup>20</sup>

Transnational networks of this era tended to function along elite connections, and Yogananda was no exception.<sup>21</sup> Yogananda, a graduate of Calcutta University and the son of a railroad executive, was “a Westernized Hindu” before he embarked on his religious career in Los Angeles.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, he later recounted that his guru had urged him to finish his college degree because Western audiences would be “more receptive to India’s ancient wisdom if the strange Hindu teacher has a university degree.”<sup>23</sup> His background informed his sense of mission. Yogananda came of age during the Bengal Renaissance, when educated Indians made claims about the universal applicability of “Vedic science.”<sup>24</sup> England tended to view India as a “lab” for the application of science and technology that proved the superiority of western “modernity.”

18. Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 29–30, 35; Rosenberg, “Transnational Currents,” 861.

19. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 3, 7–8, 61–2. When Akira Iriye revisited the topic in 2013, he stated that the phrase “cultural transnationalism” might have been a “more appropriate” term. Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 48–49.

20. Paramahansa Yogananda, “Some Aims of *East-West*,” *East-West World Wide*, November–December 1925, 16.

21. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 66.

22. Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 369.

23. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 107.

24. Lola Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 14, 17.

Recent historical research, however, emphasizes “co-production” of knowledge that highlights “contextualized and local knowledge” rather than “imposed” imperial knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Science—blended within Hinduism’s universal truths and applicability—became an avenue for Indian elites to stake their claim to concepts of rationality, progress, and modernity. They used science as an instrument for religious renewal. The resulting “neo-Hinduism” had an important impact on elites and Western perceptions of Hinduism via meditation movements but was less important to denizens of rural India.<sup>26</sup> Yogananda’s arrival in the United States to teach the “Science of Religion”—the title of his speech in Boston—was therefore the result of a long process of encounter and exchange; in his system, “science” was a term used to connote that “the techniques are based on the laws of nature and are thereby reliable.”<sup>27</sup> “Truth,” according to Yogananda, was “neither Eastern nor Western,” and he promised to deliver superior scientific techniques for accessing spiritual power.<sup>28</sup>

Yogananda arrived at a moment when American consumers were growing more receptive to the goods and ideas of other cultures. Even before World War II, Henry Luce’s “American Way” of economic and cultural power, associated with “a mass production and mass-marketing system that imagined an ever-widening abundance of goods within a culture that emphasized buying and selling, desire, glamour, and flexible, purchase-driven identities” had started to flourish.<sup>29</sup> The “consumers’ imperium” available through the expansion of American commercial and political power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century included religious ideas as well as household objects, cooking styles, and fashion.<sup>30</sup> For years, cultural critics like Willard Huntington Wright scoffed at the success of “metaphysical charlatans” who provided a “short cut to knowledge” to strivers intent on ascending “the

25. Rosenberg, “Transnational Currents,” 923; Zaheer Baber, *The Science of Empire: Scientific Knowledge, Civilization, and Colonial Rule in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 221, 250. See also Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

26. Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 7, 35, 57, 88.

27. Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 59.

28. Paramahansa Yogananda, “Yellow Journalism versus Truth: Are Eastern Teachings ‘Dangerous?’” *East-West World Wide*, January-February 1928, 7.

29. Emily S. Rosenberg, “Consuming the American Century,” in ed. Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 44.

30. Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 9–11, 14.

ladder of cosmopolitanism” in Los Angeles, where Yogananda spent the bulk of his career.<sup>31</sup> Even in the midst of anti-immigrant fears of the 1920s, Yogananda’s philosophy provided an exotic antidote—steeped in antiquity but also reconciled with Christian beliefs—to modern alienation for would-be middlebrow connoisseurs looking to connect to the wider world. A *Los Angeles Times* reader in 1925 looking to attend a religious service could choose among Yogananda’s lecture about “Healing by Christ-Power” at the Mount Washington center, a lecture by Swami Paramananda, a presentation about New Thought, a “gospel presentation” about “Slavery Days: Scenes from the South” by evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson at the Angeles Temple, or more traditional services by mainline Baptist and Methodist denominations. Those perusing the ads for a movie or a show could select from among Yogananda’s “Miracles of Yoga,” Charlie Chapman’s *The Gold Rush*, a production of *Madama Butterfly*, a new adventure of Rin-Tin-Tin, or various vaudeville acts.<sup>32</sup> Audiences received Yogananda, by all accounts an effective speaker, as a fantastic specimen: descriptions of his lectures noted his physical appearance that included “an orange robe with a Roman collar, a turban, and . . . enough long, black hair to make any of the Sutherland sisters jealous.”<sup>33</sup> Newsmen and law enforcement officials, caught up in contemporary fears about confidence men seducing women through arcane sorcery, were occasionally more hostile. In 1928, shortly after the publication of critic Katherine Mayo’s lurid anti-Hindu exposé about the abasement of women in India, a Miami newspaper referred to him as an “East Indian love cult leader.” Yogananda, in fact, sought an injunction against a police order that demanded his departure based on alleged complaints from husbands.<sup>34</sup>

Yogananda won American audiences by blending the scientific and the spiritual, the ancient and the modern, and the East and the West. Possessing a keen aptitude for spiritual innovation, Yogananda sought to introduce American audiences to *kriya* yoga, a meditation system taught to him by Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri (1855–1936), an Indian guru interested in the

31. Willard Huntington Wright, “Los Angeles—The Chemically Pure,” in *The Smart Set Anthology*, edited by Burton Rascoe and Groff Conklin (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934), 93.

32. “Display Ad 20,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1925, A2; “Display Ad 34,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1925, A9; “Display Ad 40,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1925, B11.

33. “Do Daily Dozen Easily in Mental Flip-Flops,” *The Charleston (WV) Daily Mail*, December 23, 1923, 4.

34. Robert Love, “Fear of Yoga,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (November/December 2006): 85–86.

Bhagavad-Gita and familiar with Christian doctrine based on his education at a missionary school.<sup>35</sup> Continuing in the universalist tradition of Indian intellectuals like Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, and Vivekananda, Yogananda combined his beliefs with modern science as well as elements of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> Americans at this time tended to be more receptive to meditative and philosophical than postural styles of yoga, and Yogananda's early repertoire in the United States included a practice that wed "muscle control" to mental and spiritual techniques.<sup>37</sup> He explained to audiences that Self-Realization was "a combination of the original Christianity of Jesus and the original Yoga of Krishna."<sup>38</sup> Yogananda valued "the art of spiritual living"—a consciousness of God's presence over doctrine. His approach fit within the framework of "perennial philosophy," a theologically open disposition that minimized the difference between "ritual, doctrine, and institutional reality" and played an important role in yoga's global diffusion.<sup>39</sup> Debates between modernist and fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible created an opportunity for Yogananda to establish his scientific credentials. In the wake of the Scopes Trial in 1925, *East-West* published an article by botanist Luther Burbank, who criticized "those who take refuge behind theological barbed wire fences" based on their fear of "scientific truth," which he found to be "exhilarating, tonic, healthful, and life giving" and which removed "the debasing sin of ignorance, the mother of misery, crime, inefficiency, superstition, bigotry, disease, and death." He railed that Americans opposed to the teaching of evolution "should also legislate against gravity, electricity, and the unreasonable velocity of light."<sup>40</sup>

With its tradition of experimentation with alternative beliefs, California was an ideal site for Yogananda's message. Civic leaders hosted a private reception for Yogananda at the Biltmore hotel, and his lectures filled the Music Arts Hall in 1925.<sup>41</sup> Once settled in Los Angeles, which he called "the

35. Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 67.

36. Mark Singleton, "Globalized Modern Yoga," in Diamond, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 95–96.

37. Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 27; Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131–32.

38. "Paramahansa Yogananda Gives Concluding Talk," *Self-Realization Magazine*, November–December 1951, 35–36.

39. Singleton, "Globalized Modern Yoga," 97.

40. Luther Burbank, "Science and Civilization," *East-West World Wide*, November–December 1925, 16.

41. Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2010), 170–72. Yogananda also endured a brief financial scandal in 1925.

Benares of America,” Yogananda set about creating a bustling mail-order meditation course and a network of temples.<sup>42</sup> By 1952, the year of his death at age fifty-nine, the Self-Realization Fellowship included seventy-two centers around the world, including several in India and Southern California, and a membership of approximately 150,000.<sup>43</sup> At that time, there were sixty renunciate monks living at the organization’s Mount Washington center and another forty living at its ashram in Encinitas.

## POSTWAR CONNECTIONS

Yogananda liked to tell a story that when he departed India in 1920, his father asked when he would return from his trip. Yogananda replied, “In four months, unless America needs me.”<sup>44</sup> As it turned out, he returned to India once, in 1935, when he built a headquarters for his foundation outside of Kolkata; otherwise, he continued to expand his mission in the United States. He sought to foster closer ties between the United States and a soon-to-be post-colonial India. Yogananda’s ideas found greater resonance in the post-war era when the United States sought closer economic and political ties to the developing world. At the same moment, India attained its independence, established itself as the world’s largest representative democracy, and sought to define its place among other nations.

In 1936, Yogananda dedicated his ashram in Encinitas to the mission of helping man “enlarge his sympathies” and promote a sense of world citizenship, because those who understood that “it is my America, my India, my Philippines, my Europe, my Africa” would “never lack scope for a useful and happy life.”<sup>45</sup> There were national repercussions to Yogananda’s ongoing efforts to forge global human awareness. In the context of the Cold War, culture provided a means to foster positive connections between the United States and potential postcolonial allies. Yogananda’s vision of the American and Indian civilizational partnership worked within an imaginary of American benevolence and connectedness to the “free world”—a process that recent historians call “integration.” As the historian Christina Klein explains, although integration spoke to American goals of free-market capitalism—

42. Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation—How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 114–18.

43. “Guru’s Exit,” *Time*, August 4, 1952, 59.

44. Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 56.

45. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 480.

efforts that began well before the postwar era—it also included Americans’ need to feel a sense of kinship or responsibility with the peoples of other nations—often expressed through a pedagogical tone. Within this process, American cultural texts articulated “narratives of anti-conquest” that formed the justification for America’s new global power. Nominally tolerant and inclusive, these texts sought to establish connections between nations and peoples based on fantasies of reciprocity and commonality. “Global imaginaries” played important roles in achieving both containment and integration. The former helped Americans understand the conflict in terms of “Otherness and difference” and to develop everyday social and cultural anti-communist practices rooted in fear. The latter aided in understandings of cooperation and mutuality while nevertheless relying on racial and gender hierarchies that positioned the United States at the apex of modernity.<sup>46</sup> Although containment sought to defend American values, integration sought to spread these same values through programs with an “expansive, optimistic, open quality.” The language mirrored developments in domestic life, where understandings of Asian ethnic assimilation and the creation of the “model minority myth” helped downplay concerns about American racism at a moment when the United States sought to advance its interests along the Pacific Rim. All told, this ideology fit with Americans’ self-perception of their status as the “Empire of Liberty”—a nation leading other nations like Korea and Japan toward modernization based on mutual interests rather than conquest—in a post-colonial world.<sup>47</sup>

Postwar attempts at integration provide a context for understanding Yogananda’s continued efforts at popularizing his spiritual practices by wedding meditation practices to liberal Christianity. Yogananda and *Self-Realization* voiced concerns about communism, but—given his efforts to proselytize in the United States—more often the organization’s message sought to elaborate on its connections to and commonality with American culture. Until this era, proponents of postural yoga were considered “countercultural, elite, or scandalous.”<sup>48</sup> Hindus distanced themselves from

46. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), chapters 1–2.

47. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 9–13; Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 145–46 and 153–56; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 414–45.

48. Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 160.

ascetic practice and fused yoga to western calisthenics in an effort to make India modern. By the time that Tirumalai Krishnamacharya and his students, B.K.S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois, brought modern postural yoga to the West in the 1940s and 1950s, it had already been adapted to western fitness practice. Meditative practices were, in comparison, more accepted but also considered countercultural.<sup>49</sup>

Since the United States lacked the long-term institutional networks of a formal empire at the outset of the Cold War, Yogananda's lectures and publications filled an informational gap about the decolonizing world.<sup>50</sup> In the wake of World War II, Yogananda published his memoir and most popular work, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Having ministered to American audiences for over a quarter century, Yogananda knew how to weave a compelling and popular narrative in the tradition of what Mary Louise Pratt calls "autoethnography." It was, after all, Yogananda's stated intention to engage Americans regarding terms such as modernity, civilization, science, and spirituality.<sup>51</sup>

Told in episodic encounters that spanned from his childhood in Bengal to his career in the United States, *Autobiography of a Yogi* narrates Yogananda's spiritual journey as well as those of his mentor (Swami Sri Yukteswar), his mentor's guru (Lahiri Mahasaya), and his mentor's mentor's guru (Mahavatar Babaji), while also relating the personalities to biblical figures like Jesus and John the Baptist. Early chapters include his interactions with living saints and significant historical figures like Rabindranath Tagore who gladly hosted the pious, inquisitive youth. A few of the gurus, according to Yogananda's account, anointed him as a prophet ready to evangelize India's accumulated wisdom in the West, a culmination of *kriya's* break from asceticism; an SRF pamphlet of the same era noted that Yogananda received his "Divine Mission" to the world, but "especially to the West," from God and Jesus as well as his more immediate masters.<sup>52</sup> Yogananda relates the tale of how Mahasaya received permission from Babaji to make the "spiritual solace" of discipleship open to "earnest seekers" who lived in the material world. In a phrase that

49. Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body*; Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg, eds., *Gurus of Modern India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jain, *Selling Yoga*; Syman, *The Subtle Body*.

50. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 114.

51. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge 1992), 7, 102.

52. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 65–67, 107; "Follow the Self-Realization Highway to the Infinite" undated pamphlet (c.1950–51), folder 18, carton 6, Theos Bernard Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

echoes a popular Christian gospel verse (John 17:14–19), his mentor informed him, “Not of this world, you must be in it.”<sup>53</sup> In subsequent chapters, Yogananda encounters Mahatma Gandhi and botanist Luther Burbank.

The desire to link the United States and India aligned the Self-Realization Fellowship with American foreign policy objectives that imagined international cooperation through economic and political as well as sentimental and cultural means. Readers learned about India through an array of methods. The magazine offered updates on developments at its centers across India, the world, and the United States but especially in Southern California, which included the Mt. Washington center, the Encinitas colony, an “India House” that opened in Hollywood in April 1950, and the Lake Shrine Temple that opened in Pacific Palisades in August 1950. The Hollywood center featured an Indian restaurant where renunciate servers wore saris as well as an array of cultural programs and speakers such as the consul general of India, the Indian ambassador to the United States, and visiting scholars.

The magazine’s “Notes from the News” section, in particular, offered news about contemporary India during the postwar period—more so than before the war—in an effort to generate awareness among its largely American audience. For example, as famine hit postwar India, especially parts of Yogananda’s native Bengal, *Self-Realization* lamented, “the average American is familiar with and sympathetic toward the needs of Europe, but vague and apathetic concerning the needs of ‘distant Asia.’”<sup>54</sup> At other moments, the magazine emphasized the closeness of India and the United States by noting new flight routes between New York and India that took a shade less than forty-two hours to travel.<sup>55</sup> In the early postwar years, the magazine also followed the trajectory of citizenship laws through the U.S. Congress that allowed legal entry of native Indians (rather than just Europeans born in India) to immigrate.<sup>56</sup>

The magazine’s coverage about India during partition, decolonization, and early nationhood created a narrow understanding of India. The publication thus minimized the variety of representations of India toward singular and

53. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 322–33.

54. “International Fellowship,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, September–October 1946, 34–35.

55. “Notes from the News,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, January–February–March 1946, 20.

56. SRF, “India Citizenship Bill Passes,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, September–October–November 1946, 23; “Notes from the News,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, November–December 1946, 29.

teleological ends. Even as the 1947 partition brought sectarian violence—including estimates of deaths that ranged from several hundred thousand to a million and the migration of 12.5 million people—and a militarized border between India and Pakistan, the tone and content of *Self-Realization Magazine* steadfastly maintained India's innate nonviolence and spirituality.<sup>57</sup> For obvious reasons, the magazine focused on Gandhi—even after his death—as a symbol of Indian culture. The avowedly secular leaders of modern-day India and Pakistan, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, received less, if any, attention. Nevertheless, the magazine highlighted visits from visiting Indian dignitaries, especially the Indian consul based in San Francisco, which underscored the organization's authority in establishing links, whether diplomatic or cultural, between a newly independent India and the United States.

*Self-Realization* hailed the natural affinity between American and Indian culture. Representative democracy offered an obvious place for finding common ground.<sup>58</sup> For example, the magazine printed the statement from the Indian ambassador to the United States, who—while reaffirming that India was a constitutional democracy and a secular state—also noted the nation's opposition to “every form of imperialism—whether economic or any other kind” and its antagonism to “all kinds of totalitarianism—colonialism or communist aggression.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, a lecture at India House given by Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, soon to become the founder of the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, observed the common commitment to democracy as well as individual and national freedom, which made communism antithetical to both cultures. Like Yogananda, Chaudhuri hoped for a closer relationship between the United States and India based on exchange of the American “practical drive and initiative” and the “inner poise and balance of the Indian mind.”<sup>60</sup>

57. Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, second edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 221–22.

58. Anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and passive nonviolence represented another potential thread for cooperation. See Gerald C. Horne, *The End of Empires: African Americans and India* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); and Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

59. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, “India's Policy,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, November–December 1951, 4.

60. Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, “The Spirit of Indian Culture,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, September–October 1951, 31–32.

The magazine presented Yogananda as having an intuitive understanding of the complementary relationship between the United States and India. Yogananda served as a civilizational translator and facilitator. One pamphlet stated one of the organization's main goals as furthering "the spiritual and cultural understanding between East and West" and promoting "the constructive exchange of their finest features."<sup>61</sup> In this sense, Yogananda fit the model of what the religious studies scholar Jane Iwamura has called the "Oriental monk," a long-established figure that provided American audiences with a "stable frame" with which they could sympathize during a moment of postcolonial change. This narrative "credentials the monk as an *ideological caregiver* who gains recognition by helping dominant white Americans gain spiritual insight and, often, political mission as they work out the meaning of their existence in modern life."<sup>62</sup> Although Yogananda often invoked the cause of "world brotherhood," he particularly sought to align American and Indian "civilizations" whose citizens would benefit from cultural exchange. Indeed, after his death, officials singled out these efforts for recognition. Mulk Raj Ahuja, the Consul General of India based in San Francisco and a frequent visitor to the SRF centers, eulogized Yogananda as a man who saw India and the United States not as "two separate countries but the two component parts of one single plan for the development in harmony of both material and spiritual values of man." The letter repeated the reported last words of Yogananda—"My America—My India" which for Ahuja captured the swami's dual mission.<sup>63</sup> A letter from Binay R. Sen, the Indian Ambassador to the United States who was present at his passing, noted, "no one has worked more, has given more of himself, to bind the peoples of India and America together."<sup>64</sup>

Matching Yogananda's long-standing missionary message, *Self-Realization* also stressed the usefulness of Indian spirituality for improving mental and physical wellbeing as a means for valorizing "Indian" culture within American society. Historians already note the way that Americans viewed physical fitness as a national security issue that prevented its citizens from becoming

61. "Follow the Self-Realization Highway to the Infinite," folder 18, carton 6, Theos Bernard Papers.

62. Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.

63. Mulk Raj Ahuja, "Paramahansa Yogananda: An Appreciation," *Self-Realization Magazine*, May–June 1952, 29.

64. "Tribute to PY by Ambassador Binay R. Sen," *Self-Realization Magazine*, May–June 1952, 68–69.

“soft” on communism.<sup>65</sup> Postural yoga, as reshaped by practitioners like Indra Devi (a student of Krishnamacharya), became part of the postwar fitness culture that sought to create a healthy national body. Yet fitness culture—not to mention international cultural exchange—included mental as well as physical practices to induce fortitude. Yogananda emphasized mental rather than physical aspects of yoga, although the magazine and yearly SRF convocations included demonstrations of postural yoga.<sup>66</sup> He represented his practice in a similar manner as other gurus, which was to construct yoga “as both timeless and beyond time.”<sup>67</sup> While emphasizing *kriya* yoga’s ethereal roots, Yogananda heralded its beneficial applications in modern contexts. “The goal of yoga science,” he suggested, “is to calm the mind, that without distortion it may hear the infallible counsel of the Inner Voice.”<sup>68</sup> Yogananda invoked concerns about the atomic bomb—he gave at least one talk entitled “Averting the Coming World Atomic War” in 1948—when he highlighted the potential significance of meditation in an age of anxiety.<sup>69</sup> In the *Autobiography*, he wrote that the dawn of the “Atomic Age” necessitated an improved “inner science of self-control” as well as “the outer conquest of Nature”; in fact, the best “bombproof shelter” against “mindless destruction” of the era might prove to be the “science of yoga.”<sup>70</sup>

## SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL PURSUITS

Over the course of his career, Yogananda’s work also helped Americans make sense of the dramatic economic and cultural changes they were experiencing at home. Historians have long observed the parallels between emerging social and economic formations and malleable American religious beliefs. These material-religious alliances range from the piety of small businessmen inspired

65. Shelly McKenzie, *Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 24–26.

66. See, for example, “Yoga Postures for Health,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, November–December 1951, 13–14; “Yoga Postures for Health,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, January–February 1952, 24–25; “Yoga Postures for Health,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, March–April 1952, 11–12; “Photos of SRF Convocation,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, November–December 1951, 32.

67. Joseph Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (New Delhi: New Age Books, 2009), 5; originally printed by Princeton University Press, 2004.

68. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 160.

69. “Yogananda Speaks Sunday in Phoenix,” *Scottsdale Progress*, September 30, 1948, 9.

70. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 235–36. Proponents of the benefits of yoga for health and fitness have continued to emphasize the scientific elements of the practice. See William J. Broad, *The Science of Yoga: The Risks and Rewards* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

by evangelist Charles Grandison Finney during the nineteenth-century Market Revolution to Walmart's Christian free market ethos in the late twentieth-century Sunbelt.<sup>71</sup> Efforts to redefine religious truth around "subjective religious experience" stretch back to the turn of the century, when religious thinkers shifted their end goal from "salvation to self-realization" by working within a "self-help paradigm" to guide seekers toward greater empowerment, especially within the modern consumer marketplace.<sup>72</sup> Yoga became part of this modern effort to re-conceptualize the relationship between body, mind, and spirit; indeed, the terms "self-realization" and "God-realization" were key Neo-Vedantic terms that became pillars of New Age religions based in human potential.<sup>73</sup> New Thought, a late nineteenth-century "para-Protestant" movement, influenced early books about yoga, which highlighted meditation alongside "health and hygiene" advice. New Thought and yoga practitioners were early adaptors of the notion that the pursuit of health and spiritual awareness could advance material goals as well.<sup>74</sup>

Yogananda was among those redefining the twentieth-century religious landscape according to the therapeutic needs of individual seekers.<sup>75</sup> From the start, Yogananda's originality rested in his "ability to sell a system that linked spiritual and material elements while allowing people to foreground one or the other, taking away the message they needed or wanted to hear." Yogananda's version of *kriya* yoga promised practitioners authentic insights into the "spiritual nature of reality" that could then be turned into self-empowerment, whether in one's personal life or in one's professional endeavors.<sup>76</sup> At a time when Americans worried about becoming drones within an

71. See Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Diane Winston and John Michael Giggie, *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Bethany Moreton, *To Save God and Walmart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

72. T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880–1930," in eds. T.J. Jackson Lears and Richard Wrightman Fox, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

73. Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 28; Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 14, 186.

74. Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 129–32.

75. For other movements, including Vedanta, that focused on philosophical and meditative elements of yoga, see Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 28–36 and De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*.

76. Theodore Marvin Anderson, "Reimagining Religion: The Grounding of Spiritual Politics and Practice in Modern America, 1890–1940" (PhD diss.: Yale University, 2008), 73, 87, 85.

increasingly bureaucratic society, Yogananda's teachings offered Indian culture as a means for purposeful "self-realization."

Yogananda represented "ancient" Indian religious practices as an everyday system for "modern" American lives. A popularizer, he offered meditation courses via mail order so that the multitudes might experience the "liberating science" of guru-directed yoga at home.<sup>77</sup> He sought to soothe, but not eradicate, western "materialism" by bestowing "civilizational" wisdom on an individual case-by-case basis. He used signifiers of "western" science and technology to suggest the "modernity" and practical applicability of SRF teachings in the search for the self. For example, he frequently characterized his efforts to create a faith that would "lead one to a common highway of spiritual realization, above dogma or creed."<sup>78</sup> A pamphlet entitled "Follow the Self-Realization Highway to the Infinite" expanded the metaphor. Under a heading heralding "One Basic Truth," the pamphlet boasted that SRF teachings "show that all true religions are expressions of the same basic truth and that this truth is the foundation of all science and all knowledge." The underlying truth of SRF teachings brought "clearer understanding" of "religious" people to "religion" but also to "the scientist of his sciences" and "to the business or professional man of his activities." In the spirit of the conveniences of modernity, SRF's meditation provided "the quickest conveyance" to God via "the highway . . . where all religions meet."<sup>79</sup> In other words, meditation should not be confined to the spiritual ends of an ascetic believer; on the contrary, it could enhance the performance of scientists, professionals, and businessmen. The organization distributed small prayer cards, called "Par-a-grams," that described esteemed values such as "Kindness," "Wisdom," "Generosity," "Perception," "Tolerance," "Will," "Joy," and "Calmness." The chosen topics provide aphoristic insight into positive values that might be achieved through greater self-mastery. A card for "Intuition" advised readers as follows:

You must develop the intuitive faculty, which can grow only through meditation. Develop your latent intuition and let it guide your thinking, and then march in any direction you wish and you will succeed. Your will and intuition must go hand in hand. A person with a strong will usually

77. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 483.

78. "Master' Yogananda Succumbs in L.A.," *San Diego Union*, March 9, 1952.

79. "Follow the Self-Realization Highway to the Infinite," folder 18, carton 6, Theos Bernard Papers.



explained the direction and development of postcolonial nations.<sup>84</sup> Postwar social scientists like Walt Whitman Rostow distinguished between traditional societies, where culture and religion shaped economic, political, and social life, and modern societies, which favored individualism, capitalism, and complex institutions. The theory identified the United States, with its “liberal values, capitalist economy, and pluralist democracy,” as the “first new nation” to reach the “universal end point.”<sup>85</sup> The language of development, which used “neutral-sounding language” of progress and culture to perpetuate longstanding practices and perceptions, permeated postwar American encounters with the postcolonial world. Yet even as modernization theory positioned the United States at the apex of western civilization, there were persistent concerns about Americans’ ability and desire to lead other cultures in their “development.”<sup>86</sup>

In this context, Yogananda positioned India not as a “new” nation but rather as a “mature” civilization with a “spiritual science” that had something to offer in terms of modern material progress. Despite being “materially poor,” India had “an inexhaustible fund of divine wealth” from which to draw; it was “especially fitted to make great contributions” through its powers of concentration.<sup>87</sup> As a back-page advertisement explained, “America has specialized in industrial expansion, England in political science, Germany in mechanical inventions, France in art, Italy in music, China in social relations. INDIA FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL HAS SPECIALIZED IN THE SCIENCE OF THE SOUL.”<sup>88</sup> Despite the acknowledgment of multiple civilizations, Yogananda viewed himself as an important agent in securing a close bond between the United States and India. His *Autobiography* emphasized that his mission to the United States achieved a long-awaited link between the cultures; for its part, *Self-Realization* suggested that his final moments encapsulated his destiny. With the Indian ambassador to the United States in the audience, Yogananda’s final speech included many of his favorite themes: he noted that he liked to be an American (he had become a citizen) when he thought of American “energy,” but news of the premature

84. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 7–8.

85. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 34–36, 41–43, 22–23; Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 2, 4.

86. Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally*, 56–58.

87. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 34, 72–73.

88. “India Specialized in Soul Culture,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, April–May–June 1945, back cover.

deaths of successful American businessmen made him “like to be a Hindu—to sit on the banks of the Ganges and concentrate on the factory of Mind from which spiritual skyscrapers can come. . . . Somewhere between the two great civilizations of efficient America and spiritual India lies the answer for a model world civilization.”<sup>89</sup> The goal for American audiences, of course, was to bring the two pieces together, with individual practitioners the beneficiaries of the convergence.

Yogananda’s valorization of the Indian past represents an effort that highlights difference in order to articulate a place for India within the global imaginary that would complement, not challenge, America’s sense of its “benevolent supremacy.”<sup>90</sup> Such efforts represent the power of religious ideas within progressive ideas of diversity in constructing American hegemony. The progressive adoption of multiculturalism after the war paradoxically helped create a globalized sense of “difference” that appropriated “new exotics” in the production and sale of postwar mass culture.<sup>91</sup> Rather than understanding the importance of histories of encounter, exchange, and domination, this type of civilizational multiculturalism ascribes to a view of culture wherein, in the words of Prashad, “culture is bounded into authentic zones with pure histories that need to be accorded a grudging dignity by policies of diversity.”<sup>92</sup>

Yogananda’s pluralist imagination thus empowered American audiences to construct an identity through the consumption of a rural and ancient India, a spiritual product whose consumption could enhance their modern selves. Even as Yogananda and members of the SRF highlighted the inherent modernity of India, they romanticized elements of India’s premodern origins. This emphasis followed the magazine’s tendency to characterize India along monolithic religious and cultural lines as opposed to, say, a broad array of cultural processes or the political or economic desire for self-sufficiency articulated by Nehru during the early years of post-partition India. The magazine’s editors highlighted the significance of the rural village to “Indian

89. Paramahansa Yogananda, “Last Speech Given by Yoganandaji,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, May–June 1952, 70–71.

90. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 43.

91. Stuart Hall, “‘The Local and the Global’: Culture, Globalization, and the World-System,” in *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 27, 33–34.

92. Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 61.

civilization.” In 1946, the magazine re-printed an interview with Gandhi that lauded the purity of villages in India untouched by Western markers of modernity like the telegraph or railroads; there, according to Gandhi, “the spirituality . . . is unconscious of herself. It is an inherited culture.”<sup>93</sup>

Yet if Gandhi sought to construct a usable past of Indian authenticity and self-sufficiency in pursuit of independence, the magazine perhaps had a different goal: the SRF had to create a saleable, consumable, and apolitical “India” that would appeal to American audiences. The SRF center in Long Beach captured this imaginary world with its production of “A Night in India” at the Wilma Hastings Auditorium in June 1952. As with most SRF events, the program sought to blend “western” and “Indian” cultural achievements: musicians played “Come unto Him” (from Handel’s *Messiah*) and a rendition of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Song of India” before the performance of a play entitled “The Song of the Sadhu,” penned by a devotee, which included a cast of SRF monks as well as children from its Sunday school. The program assured audiences that the play portrayed “the true India, an India composed mostly of the villages, where daily life and eternal God are brought into effortless harmony by the humble magnet call of a deep faith such as one encounters everywhere among the noble country folk of that land.” A section entitled “A Word about Our Program” captured the essentialism at the heart of the contrast between the “modern” and “urban” West and the “rural” East, even as it acknowledged India’s urban growth:

In the light of the present world conditions, that presentation is rare which attempts to unite East and West through appreciation of spiritual virtues, often dormant within a nation’s culture.

It is fitting that when we think of India we immediately envision, not the skyscrapers and television studios of our western civilization, but rather a simple people of outer and inner simplicity, whose spiritual ancestry brooks no comparison.

True, India’s outward culture is now becoming more modern, in the Western sense, but tonight we wish to wend our way with you in thought beyond the metropolises such as Bombay and Calcutta, to the romantic simplicity of the India village where the spiritual fragrance of ancient India is still apparent in the face of her rapid material advancement.

93. “Villages of India,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, September–October 1946, 27.

As we walk through this ancient land, gazing upon the vast fields of grain, the shepherds tenderly watching over their flocks, the golden beauty of the sky, the hoary majesty of the mountains, we drink deep of a spiritual atmosphere which penetrates the very soul of man . . .

Thus a true oriental devotee looks at life. Let us tonight look through his eyes, as we visit the real India. Perhaps we too shall see the subtle beauty of Spirit hiding behind the forms of art and nature.<sup>94</sup>

The note instructed audience members to ignore the visible traces of India and instead use their imagination to see, taste, smell, and hear a “real” India of the spirit. “A Night in India” acknowledged an “outward culture” of modern India but invited audiences to consume the “ancient India” of the villages to “unite” the “East” and “West” through a mutual appreciation of spirituality.

#### **EMBODYING THE CIVILIZATIONAL CONNECTION: YOGANANDA AND SAINT LYNN**

Yogananda’s argument that meditation could lead to greater productivity took root at a moment when American cultural critics worried that the expansion of the white-collar economy imperiled white masculinity. Given its location in Los Angeles, the SRF drew an array of artists and entertainers into its fold, but its most celebrated convert was a businessman, James J. Lynn, whose friendship with Yogananda epitomized the goals of his mission. The representations of Yogananda and Lynn’s friendship in *Self-Realization* capture the organization’s efforts to nurture both sentimental and material connections between the nations and point us to the organization’s business-friendly ethos. Their relationship also provides an outward-looking intervention at a moment when business activists sought to define the United States as a “Christian” nation that stood for faith, freedom, and “free enterprise.”<sup>95</sup>

Much of Yogananda’s writing described civilizational deficits that could be met through encounter and exchange. Yogananda, of course, was most concerned with forging an alliance between “spiritual” India and “industrial” America. In a message reprinted after his death, Yogananda noted that “the West” suffered from “over-production” due to its “concentration on unnecessary objects of luxury” while “the East” suffered from lack of production, which he associated with lack of factories as well as “inactivity and laziness.”

94. “A Night in India” program, June 1952, folder 18, carton 6, Theos Bernard Papers.

95. Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), xiv.

Yogananda argued, “Comfort can be acquired only by a balanced attitude” through self-mastery that allowed one to be “comfortably active” and “actively comfortable.” Addressing his American audience, Yogananda noted that the “astute man” should “apply system and science to better his health, prosperity, and social and international life. . . . Your engagement with business is important, but your appointment to serve others is more important, and your engagement with meditation, God, and Truth is most important.”<sup>96</sup>

The SRF’s publications frequently lamented the imbalance between the material and spiritual achievements in the United States and India—whereas America possessed “more millionaires than any other country,” India had more “actual saints.”<sup>97</sup> No sermon or pamphlet could convey Yogananda’s desire for balance better than his friendship with Lynn, a midwestern insurance businessman who became his disciple and, from 1952 until his death in 1955, successor at the SRF. In many ways, their friendship conformed to the typical trajectory of the “Oriental Monk” relationship with spiritual seekers. The history of American encounters with Eastern spirituality frequently follows a formalized narrative in which a “lone” monk figure nurtures a white child—often with an “ambivalent” relationship with the dominant culture—and causes a transformation of both the child and the West, saving them from “capitalist greed, brute force, totalitarian rule, and spiritless technology.”<sup>98</sup> Lynn, whose SRF name became Rajarsi Janakananda, first met Yogananda at a lecture in Kansas City in 1932 and became a disciple immediately thereafter. A successful businessman, Lynn nevertheless fit Iwamura’s characteristics of a white man with some ambivalence toward his economic and cultural moment. Like many white-collar workers of the era, he complained of a generalized anxiety. He credited Yogananda with curing his nervousness by providing a “healing light” and entrance into a “spiritual realm.”<sup>99</sup>

At a moment when the United States’ relationship with Pacific Rim allies was often cast in terms of a parent-child or male-female hierarchies, the Yogananda-Lynn friendship emphasized balance.<sup>100</sup> In the relationship

96. Paramahansa Yogananda, “A Well-Balanced Life Means Happiness,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, March–April 1953, 30.

97. “Highest Achievements through Self-Realization: Authentic Masters of India,” 18, folder 18, carton 6, Theos Bernard Papers.

98. Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 20.

99. Dick Fowler, “The Life of James J. Lynn,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, March–June 1955, 4–16, reprinted from *Kansas City Star*, May 13, 1951.

100. Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally*.

between Yogananda and Lynn, the SRF found its test case: Lynn received India's "Sacred Teachings," and Yogananda had his Henry Ford who represented "Western business ability."<sup>101</sup> Just a few years before sociologists like William Whyte questioned the bureaucratic focus of the Organization Man and author Sloan Wilson documented the travails of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (and some sixty years before the fictional Don Draper visited an Esalen-like coastal retreat in the final episode of *Mad Men*), the organization presented Lynn as an object lesson in the benefits of self-realization. Unlike the Beat poets, the era's most famous spiritual experimenters, Lynn's business acumen had the potential to position the SRF as a legitimate belief system for middlebrow audiences.

In the end, Yogananda was well aware of Lynn's usefulness to his mission; he referred to his disciple as "Saint Lynn" and noted that he filled the promise of "potential saints" in America, a mission that had summoned him to the West. As a saint encountered early in his life told him, Americans and Indians were "[A]like in soul though diverse in outer experience," yet "neither West nor East will flourish if some form of disciplinary yoga not be practiced."<sup>102</sup> Yogananda highlighted Lynn's success while also noting their common spiritual dedication. He noted that Lynn was "more than most of us, busy with many large affairs" but that he and Lynn "hardly ever talk business or worldly matters." Instead, they meditated together. Yogananda praised Lynn for his "simple habits" and "balanced life" in the midst of his business responsibilities. In short, Lynn became a Westerner who proved the "worth" of *kriya* yoga.<sup>103</sup> Lynn returned the praise lavished upon him. In addition to his monetary support to the SRF—he purchased and built the Golden World Colony while Yogananda traveled in India—he echoed Yogananda's appeal to balance the material and spiritual.

Over the years, the magazine published photographs of Lynn and Yogananda that depicted the desired harmony between "Eastern spirituality" and "Western materiality." The photographs ranged from showing affinity to hybridity to antithesis. One photo, which depicts the men holding hands, with Yogananda in a Western-style jacket and pants and Lynn in white pants with no shirt and a shaved head, featured a caption with words from Lynn's successor, Sister Daya, who commented, "Seldom has the world seen such

101. "Highest Achievements through Self-Realization: Authentic Masters of India," 18.

102. Yogananda found an early American ally in botanist Luther Burbank, but Burbank died relatively early in their acquaintance. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 65, 364.

103. "Words of Master about Mr. Lynn," *Self-Realization Magazine*, March–June 1955, 22.

a perfect friendship.”<sup>104</sup> Other photographs suggested a convergence of cultures: a photograph captioned “A Great Hindu Yogi and a Great American Yogi—Masters of Themselves” showed both men in Encinitas in 1952 dressed identically in short *dhotis*.<sup>105</sup> Still another photo showed Lynn in 1954 in a meditative pose dressed in a business suit with a caption from Yogananda stating, “I am proud that in Mr. Lynn . . . a Westerner stepped forth to show the world the worth in daily life of yoga training.”<sup>106</sup> Another photo depicted Lynn in *samadhi* above the ocean at the Encinitas hermitage with the words, “I have found that nothing the world can give me is comparable to the joy of meditation and the consciousness of God’s presence.”<sup>107</sup> Yet another photo published (posthumously) in 1957 showed Yogananda and Lynn “hand in hand” with Mr. Lynn in a business suit and Yogananda in robes. The caption quotes Yogananda as saying that Mr. Lynn “represents the best in American business principles as well as in universal spiritual principles.”<sup>108</sup> In the representation of this relationship, *Self-Realization* found a metaphor for a civilizational partnership that worked within the imaginary of harmonious integration of spiritual and material principles.

Yogananda arrived in the United States at a moment when cultural internationalism sought to foster an inclusive global solidarity, yet he also proselytized over a period of time when the consumer marketplace increasingly mediated spiritual and religious beliefs. In his commitment to creating a forgivable modernity that blended scientific truth, material gain, and a broad sense of altruism, Yogananda illuminates the accommodationist relationship between spiritual beliefs and capitalism characterized as “new age capitalism” that, while often linked to the counterculture of the 1960s, has its roots in longer strands of encounter.

As a result, we should perhaps think more about the ways that, from the start, the emergence of American economic hegemony stemmed from managing difference, even within claims of universal truths. Religious pluralism informed the emergence of a transnational imaginary that empowered white

104. *Self-Realization Magazine*, July–August 1955, inside cover.

105. “Mr. Lynn’s Words about Master and SRF,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, March–June 1955, 27–44.

106. *Self-Realization Magazine*, September–October 1955, inside back cover.

107. *Self-Realization Magazine*, May–June 1956, back cover.

108. “Master and Mr. Lynn, Hand in Hand,” *Self-Realization Magazine*, May–June 1957, inside cover.

elites to adapt and redeploy cultural practices from around the world that allowed the practitioner, not the actual practice, to claim “authenticity.”<sup>109</sup> During the twentieth century, the vision of universality and multiracial cooperation became commodified within a pluralistic logic of contemporary capitalism that prioritized personal therapy and self-transformation. Yogananda’s rhetoric indicated an unequal sense of partnership between the “civilizations” in which ancient India could safely supplement, but not supplant, modern American productivity. Yogananda helped translate “civilizational” wisdom into individual practice acquired within the consumer marketplace. He helped to repackage Eastern spirituality as a path to personal success—a replacement, perhaps, for the Protestant work ethic within the global economy.

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109. Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™*, 195.