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## The World Parliament of Religions, the Swami, and the Evangelist: Contextualizing Late 19th-Century American Responses to Hinduism

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# The World Parliament of Religions, the Swami, and the Evangelist: Contextualizing Late 19th-Century American Responses to Hinduism

Anne R. Richards

## Abstract

This article explores how Hinduism and other religions and philosophies outside the Christian traditions were received by Americans influenced by secularism, science, globalization, and expanding U.S. imperialism in the late 19th century. The article also explores the role of two missionaries, John Henry Barrows and Swami Vivekananda, arguably the most influential participants in the World Parliament of Religions of 1893.

Get Karma, good—well rubbed into you—absorb it, wallow in it,  
and then you will batter down all the obstacles of life.  
—*New York Times* book review, 1896

A journalist writing four years after the shuttering of the World's Columbian Exposition described Chicago's Lake Front Park<sup>1</sup> as a "barren waste" (*The New York Times*, 1897, p. 13).<sup>2</sup> Dominating this "eyesore" and "source of annoyance" was the building that had housed the 1893 General Committee on the Congress of Religions, which came to be known as the World Parliament of Religions.<sup>3</sup> The fire-ravaged park also contained a tangle of railroad tracks; a sculpture described as "a nightmare in bronze, supposed to represent the late Mr. Columbus as he appeared to the distempered visions of the artist"; and "a varied assortment of men out of

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., Jackson Park, as it is known today.

<sup>2</sup> That the reporter was from New York City may have darkened his view of the abandoned fairground. According to Robert W. Rydell (2005), the U.S. Congress had been charged in 1890 with deciding whether the Exposition would take place in Chicago or New York City. "New York's financial titans, including J. P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and William Waldorf Astor, pledged \$15 million to underwrite the fair if Congress awarded it to New York City. Not to be outdone, Chicago's leading capitalists and exposition sponsors, including Charles T. Yerkes, Marshall Field, Philip Armour, Gustavus Swift, and Cyrus McCormick, responded in kind. Furthermore, Chicago's promoters presented evidence of significant financial support from the city and state as well as over \$5 million in stock subscriptions from people from every walk of life. What finally led Congress to vote in Chicago's favor was banker Lyman Gage's ability to raise several million additional dollars in a 24-hour period to best New York's final offer."

<sup>3</sup> Now the Art Institute of Chicago.

work, and men to whom work [was] only an abstract proposition” (*The New York Times*, 1897, p. 13). In 1897, Chicago’s population of nearly 2 million had been increasing by 50,000 annually although in many neighborhoods, such as those surrounding the park, water could not be pumped above the first floor of buildings.

During six months in 1893, more than 20 million visitors from around the globe streamed to the park’s “White City” (Rydell, 2005), and thousands crowded into the Hall of Columbus in the Memorial Art Palace to witness “the birth of formal interreligious dialogue worldwide” (Parliament of the World’s Religions, 2015b). Delegates to the World Parliament of Religions, which took place from September 11–27, represented 41 spiritual traditions (Berkley Center, n.d.), including “Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam” (Michaud & Adiprasetya, 2004).

The Parliament inspired a wide range of religiously inflected responses. One attendee planned to establish a similar parliament in Jerusalem. A Mr. Kiretchjiam was reported to have “distinguished himself and his people [Armenian Apostolic Christians] on the platform of the world’s fair parliament of religions by a remarkable speech, which was entitled ‘A Voice from the Young Men of the Orient’” (*The Atlanta Constitution*, 1897, p. 6) and which was said to be the “first cry of Armenians” heard in the United States. Soon after the Parliament, Kiretchjiam addressed the church clubs of New York City, which consisted “of men prominent in business and professional circles,” and through such outreach he founded the Armenian Relief Association (*The Atlanta Constitution*, 1897, p. 6). According to historians of the Baha’i faith, practice of their religion on American soil can be traced to the Parliament (Abdu’l Bahá in America, 2011).

Catholic speakers at the Parliament had traveled from as far away as Australia, Brazil, and Belgium. And many Christian delegates, like delegates from other traditions, traveled extensively in the United States before and after the event. In summer of 1894, *The New York Times* (1894b) reported that “Momolu Massaquoi, an African Prince from Vei Territory, Liberia, West Africa, son of King Lahai Massaquoi of the Salinas, called at Police Headquarters . . . and paid his respects to Superintendent Byrnes. Prince Massaquoi has been doing missionary work in this country. He was a delegate to the Parliament of Religions at the World’s Fair. He is going back to Africa soon” (p. 8). One of the founders of the Brotherhood of Christian Unity, which was an “outgrowth of the religious parliament of the fair,” Massaquoi signed his name to this statement: “For the purpose of uniting with all those who desire to serve God and their fellow-men under the inspiration of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, I hereby enroll myself a member in the Brotherhood of Christian Unity” (*The New York Times*, 1893a, p. 1). Headlining the list of signatories to the new Brotherhood was the chairman of the World Parliament of Religions, John Henry Barrows (1847–1902). In New York City, immediately after the event concluded, an individual identified as “Professor Richey” read the paper he had presented “at the Parliament of Religions, on ‘The Anglican Communion and Its Claims’” (p. 5). According to *The New York Times* (1893c), “Prof. Richey also gave a short review of the work accomplished at the parliament” (p. 5). In addition to delegates and visitors, documents regarding the Parliament circulated;

most notably, cheap copies of the 1,000-plus-page proceedings were quickly made available throughout the United States.

As chairman of the Parliament, John Henry Barrows traveled more extensively in the United States and around the world than any other Christian associated with the Congress. An established Presbyterian clergyman at the time of the Parliament, he had been ordained a Congregationalist minister some decades before, when Congregationalist orthodoxy was being reshaped to reflect a more liberal perspective on human possibilities. Christians embracing liberal religious organizations such as Congregationalism, Unitarianism, and Universalism were likely to agree that “a belief in Christ has nothing to fear from the developments of science” (*The New York Times*, 1896c, p. 10). In this, the Transcendentalist and Unitarian Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and similarly oriented individuals were continuing on the path of Reformation clergy who had painstakingly constructed Christianity as a religion of reason.

It is quite possible that the extended encounter with India had been playing a substantive role in shaping western understandings of Christianity. Both Transcendentalism and modern science emerged during a time of deepening western encounter with what many of the faithful perceived as pantheistic or atheistic easterners. Missionaries working outside the West had long been challenged to make Christianity palatable to potential converts not overly concerned with the influence of a unitary God on humankind or inclined to commit to the exclusive worship of a father god/trinity. In efforts to make all potentially effective arguments for Christ, missionaries had developed rhetorics of western progress, western science, and, for good measure, western democracy. Secular discourse thus had become part of the rhetorical toolkit for people simultaneously espousing an indispensable faith and would have been used alongside distinctly religious discourse.

When the World Parliament of Religions threw open its doors, eastern philosophy and spirituality already were sources of profound interest to westerners. Arthur Schopenhauer’s (1788–1860) appreciation for the Upanishads is well known. Read throughout the West for a century or more, translations of eastern texts had likewise helped shape the Transcendentalist movement, whose adherents and others in turn promoted the “scientific” study and comparison of religions, including Christianity. According to Nathaniel Preston (n.d.), Walt Whitman (1819–1892), who often incorporated Hindu concepts and imagery into his poetry, owned copies of many texts on India although he likely was neither a devoted Hindu nor an expert on the religion. The Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), in contrast, was a “serious student of Eastern religion and philosophy” (Andrews, 2014). Raised and baptized a Unitarian, he had severed relations with the church as a young man (Higgins, 2017). Attempting, instead, to “[model] his life at Walden Pond on the instructions given to adepts of yoga” in the *Bhagavad Gita* (Andrews, 2014), he described his morning rituals in this manner:

I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the  
Bhagavat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have

elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma, and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water-jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges. (Thoreau, 1854)

Scholarship undertaken primarily by westerners fluent in eastern languages and in philological methods thus was contributing to Americans' increasing fascination and discomfort with the East and was destined to play a key role in the unfolding of the Parliament.

At the same time, newspaper reports published during the decade of the Parliament demonstrated widespread irreverence towards Christianity. In February 1896, a Jersey City journalist reported that a certain Julius Feicke had been elected a member of the Hudson County Liquor Dealers' Association. The "ex-pastor," the reporter observed, "had left the pulpit to become a saloon keeper" (*The New York Times*, 1896a, p. 8). The same column recorded that "a sneak thief got into the house of Charles A. Johnson, 546 Newark Avenue, yesterday and stole the family Bible. As nothing else was taken, the theft is supposed to have been the work of a religious crank" (p. 8). Contemporary books also indicated the iconoclasm of the age. A December 18, 1893 *New York Times* column dedicated to books recently published highlighted, among other titles, *Evolution in Science and Revolution in Religion*; Honoré de Balzac's *Two Young Married Women*; and Ambrose Bierce's *Can Such Things Be?*; as well as two volumes on the Parliament (1893b, p. 3). On May 28, 1894, the paper noted publication of *The Jungle Book*; *The Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man*; *Was the Apostle Peter Ever in Rome?*; *Roger Williams: the Pioneer of Religious Liberty*; and *Judaism at the World's Parliament of Religions*, along with *Christian Unity Proved by Scriptures* (1894a, p. 3).

As a result of the World Parliament of Religions, the frequently irreconcilable rhetorics of speakers outside the pale of Christianity were, at the turn of the 19th century, being featured in discussions from the parlors and pulpits of Boston to those of Atlanta and San Francisco and beyond. But Americans who rejected rationality as the basis of true religion and who, as a result, could be exasperated by the spirit of the age, were likely to resist not only the premises of the Parliament, but also cultural changes such as the fashion among contemporary preachers to discourse upon topics that struck critics as worldly. In a sermon titled "Christ Crowded Out," reproduced at length in *The Atlanta Constitution* on October 13, 1902, a popular evangelist named Ostrum delivered a sermon that included an unexpected encomium of Barrows and that lambasted the fashion of considering secular themes during Sunday service. The evangelist counseled his audience at the Baptist Tabernacle that "[d]iscussions about the Philippines and Cuba and Mars and the moon, the form of which magazine editors and statesmen ought to be able to

manage better than religious leaders,” should not “take the place of an ungloved hand of mercy reaching to uplift every needy man” (p. 9).

As *The Atlanta Constitution* recorded in an editorial comment published on September 24, 1893, there had been substantial opposition to the tolerant tenor of the Parliament. The writer stated that “[t]he Baptists . . . withdrew from the world’s fair congresses” because the fair was not closed on Sundays and were “particularly exacerbated by the apparent success of these gatherings. [One critic said] that the coming together of the creeds remind[ed] him of the witches in Macbeth, who each brought something to the pot—an adder’s skin, babies’ fingers and other unsacramental things, and then danced around the fire, waiting to see what would come out of the steam” (p. 18). In May of 1894 at the Lexington Avenue Baptist Church in New York City, J. L. Campbell gave a series of lectures on “The Parliament of Religions, or Christianity and the World’s Great Faiths.” Titled “Christ and Confucius,” “Christ and Buddha,” “Christ and Theosophy,” “Christ and Mahomet,” “Christ and the Hebrew Problem,” and “Christ the Light of the World” (*The New York Times*, 1894c, p. 8), these lectures had the evident objective of installing Christianity at the apex of a religious multiverse. Such rejoinders were to be expected, for detractors of the West and of Christianity had been given a well-publicized platform at the Parliament. Kinza Riuge M. Hirai (dates unknown; a distinguished Japanese Buddhist), Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb (1846–1916; one of the earliest prominent European-American converts to Islam [Curtis, 2008]); and Swami Vivekananda (Narendra Nath Datta; 1863–1902; student of and successor to Ramakrishna) all delivered widely publicized, critical addresses there.

Interest in Oriental religions and cultures was already at a pitch in the United States when Vivekananda arrived in 1893. Although the iconic minarets of what is now the University of Tampa had been gleaming in the Florida sun for a few years when the Parliament convened in Illinois, *The Atlanta Constitution* suggested that the Northern United States was especially prone to Oriental mania. Wrote one *Constitution* journalist in 1893, in an article concerning the Parliament of Religions and titled “What Is the Matter?,” “Boston is in a spasm of delight because Protap Chunder Mozoomdar is coming to that city to lecture. Perhaps it would be a good idea to fence in this Republic of Bedlam before its madness spreads to the rest of the world” (p. 2a). The journalist lamented that

. . . cultured Boston listens enraptured to the heathenish jargon of Protap Chunder Mozoomdar. . . . This gifted son of thunder is not the only religionist from India’s coral strand who has been welcomed in Christian circles at the north during the present year. There seems to be a craze in that section over Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Confucianism and every ism outside of our orthodox lines of faith. (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1893b, p. 2a)

Vivekananda, whose adopted religious name means, roughly, “joyful conscience,” was widely regarded as the most influential and popular of all the speakers to address the Parliament. He arrived in the United States about 30 years

after the publication of *Walden* and its laudatory passages concerning the *Baghavad Gita*, decades after the Transcendentalist movement had passed. Crucially, he arrived when a resurgence of faith within the United States, following the intense confusion occasioned in large part by the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), was underway.

William W. Kinsley, author of *Old Faiths and New Facts* (1896) asserted that, "The first effort of modern scientific inquiry ha[d] been to weaken faith and make . . . ourselves but processes in a vast evolution, parts of an unchangeable order, wheels and pinions, merely, in a mechanism whose movements reach from motes to sun-clusters" (*The New York Times*, 1896d, p. 16). Likewise, as the Evangelist Ostrum would inform his Baptist audience, the secularization of society made

man a kind of adjunct to a yard stick, or a motor, or a bank account. Hardened with what we call exclusive business, we would refuse the very oil on the axle of life, scarce take delight in a bunch of calla lilies because we wish it were celery so we could eat it. We would become a race without music and a people without life. (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1902, p. 9)

But in Kinsley's view, "A reaction from . . . paralyzing skepticism [had] already set in . . . A faith fervent as that felt before science had birth seems destined again to prevail. . ." (*The New York Times*, 1896d, p. 16).

Vivekananda's very timely themes were compassion and spiritual evolution, and thousands of listeners at the Parliament were said to have been moved, if not "mesmerized," by his talks. Vivekananda had studied with Ramakrishna and was chosen by the dying saint to promulgate his spiritual ideas and methods. In India, his teachings resonated with a burgeoning nationalism (Sharma, 2013) although mention of this seems absent from the American newspapers of the day, which typically characterized his thought as inscrutable, sophistic, or impracticable. In addition to the proceedings of the Parliament, in which his speeches were faithfully reproduced, *Eight Lectures by the Swami: Vivekananda on Karma Yoga* was published by the Vedanta Society and yawningly reviewed by *The New York Times* in 1896 (1896c).

Presumably as a result of both his popularity with the American public and his missionary zeal, Vivekananda did not return to India immediately but spent four years after the Parliament traveling across the United States, staying with families and speaking with religious and spiritual groups. In spring of 1894, Vivekananda gave talks at private homes in New York City. According to one recorder of the social whirl, "A large number of invitations [to these talks] had been sent out, and the many guests present showed great interest in the discourse of the Hindu lecturer" (*The New York Times*, 1894d, p. 8). The column suggested the type of society the Swami often kept while in the East, a society concerned with the activities of the secretary of the British Embassy, of Bishop Neely of Maine, of Sir Julian Pauncefoot and the Count and Countess de Festetico. These luminaries rented villas and cottages for the summer, traveled to "their charming country place on the Merrimac River," spent "the autumn and the winter in the south of France," had "not yet

returned from their yachting cruise in the South Pacific Ocean” or had just sailed “to Bar Harbor on the *Sultana*” (*The New York Times*, 1894d, p. 8). In 1894 in Maine, Vivekananda stayed at the Green Acre Hotel at the invitation of Sarah Jane Farmer of the city of Eliot (Maine Memory Network, 2018). The hotel, now associated with Baha’i education, provided a salon for philosophers and religious teachers from around the world during summers in the late 19th century. Vivekananda also traveled among the humbler classes, and in February 1895, *The New York Times* reported that he was delivering public lectures in Brooklyn, then the third largest city in America. He was so popular among the working men and women of the metropolis that Monday talks were being added to his itinerary. His second tour of the United States took place between 1899 and 1902, the year of his death. In 1900 he traveled to California and stayed with friends at their home in Pasadena for six weeks (American Vedantist, 2018). During that final tour, as he gave lectures and founded centers for the propagation of Ramakrishna’s teachings, his celebrity became firmly established.

Vivekananda had a great deal to say about American society and about westerners’ intellectual and spiritual habits. Consider this brief example of his critique of western science, a critique not entirely unlike that offered by many Christians of his—and our—day:

For practical purposes let us talk in the language of modern science. But I must ask you to bear in mind that, as there is religious superstition, so also there is a superstition in the matter of science. There are priests who take up religious work as their speciality; so also there are priests of physical law, scientists. As soon as a great scientist’s name, like Darwin or Huxley, is cited, we follow blindly. It is the fashion of the day. Ninety-nine per cent of what we call scientific knowledge is mere theories. And many of them are no better than the old superstitions of ghosts with many heads and hands, but with this difference that the latter differentiated man a little from stocks and stones. True science asks us to be cautious. Just as we should be careful with the priests, so we should be with the scientists. Begin with disbelief. . . . Even in such a science as mathematics, the vast majority of its theories are only working hypotheses. With the advent of greater knowledge they will be thrown away. (Vivekananda, n.d.)

Not to diminish the significance of the venture, and to state the obvious, the World Parliament of Religions failed both to embody and to achieve respect for the world’s diverse spiritual traditions. Patriarchy, racism, ethnocentrism, and imperialism were among the values influencing American society in the late 19th century, and, by extension, the format of the Parliament. Only 19 of its 400 official delegates (Berkley Center, n.d.) had been women, for instance. Although not located in the American South, where Jim Crow was taking shape in the wake of Reconstruction, Chicago in the 1890s nonetheless would have contained racially distinct neighborhoods in which “blacks separated themselves not merely as a



matter of choice or custom. Instead, realtors and landlords [would have] steered blacks away from white neighborhoods[,] and municipal ordinances and judicially enforced racial covenants signed by homeowners [would have] kept blacks out of white areas” (Lawson, n.d.). In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the U.S. Supreme Court, in upholding an “equal but separate” provision of a controversial Louisiana law, reflected “scientific judgments of the time that light-skinned people had greater intelligence and a higher degree of civilization than darker-skinned groups, opinions that fueled U.S. imperialism in the 1890s” (Lawson, n.d.). Unsurprisingly, the European-American Chicagoans who planned and organized the Columbian Exposition were perceived as imperialistic, paternalistic, and ethnocentric by many of the African Americans hoping to participate in the project (Paddon & Turner, 1995). And although African Americans were represented well at other religious congresses during the Exposition, Fannie Barrier Williams was the only official presenter at the World Parliament of Religions who was African American.

Native Americans, then widely considered “ignorant, lazy, low, cunning,” and “treacherous” (*The New York Times*, 1896c, p. 10), were excluded entirely from the Parliament (Michaud & Adiprasetya, 2004). A contemporary book reviewer stated, “The Indian [Native American] question appears to be everlasting. It will certainly continue to be discussed until the Indians are exterminated or merged in the white population of the country, and under the present system of Governmental care of them neither issue seems within the realm of the possible” (*The New York Times*, 1896c, p. 10). In contrast, Pandita Ramabai, a Hindu convert to Christianity and a favorite on the American mission circuit in the 1880s, had been known to confront Christian audiences with the story of U.S. genocide against Native Americans and the horrors of U.S. slavery, and to insist that the characterization of Native Americans and African Americans as inferior was a strategy intended to promote the political objectives of the powerful (Arora, 2014).

Ultimately there were multiple reasons, including the Sublime Porte’s disinclination to participate, for incorporating minimal information about Islam into the final program (Michaud & Adiprasetya, 2004). In large part because of the West’s centuries-long conflict with the Ottoman Empire, most American Christians held negative views of Islam. Barrows himself, about to leave for India, informed his audience that he would not pass through Turkey to missionize. He said, “I will not be permitted to do so” because “The Turks are a cruel people, lower than the Arabs in intellect and civilization, and they will be intolerant to Christians so long as they have dominion over them. The only remedy is to reduce them to subjugation” (*The New York Times*, 1896d, p. 12). A secretary of the Armenia Relief Association invited to speak at a meeting of philanthropic organizations in Atlanta in 1897 demonstrated a similar style of apocalyptic thinking, which characterized and characterizes many Christians’ understanding of Islam, when she announced that “[t]he eastern question is the great question which shall rule the earth, God and the devil” (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1897, p. 6). *The Atlanta Constitution* faithfully recorded the woman’s denunciation of Islam, a discourse indicating familiarity with then-fashionable constructions of the Ottoman Empire as the sick man of Europe:

The great dragon of Mohammedanism—I mean that institution in which no home is possible, no honor to women, no sanctity of Christianity, no reverence for motherhood and therefore no kinship in fatherhood. This dragon of evil power wreaks with pestilence by which the atmosphere of the whole world is becoming contaminated. Anarchy in Europe, and commercial corruption and political intrigue are expressions of a moral palsy which is the result of this miasmatic curse, of this great loathesome [sic] monster which lives to destroy moral sense among the millions of the orient. (p. 6)

According to the same article, the plight of Armenian Christians—whose ethnic cleansing would, upon the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, already be well underway—was first brought before the American public’s eye at the World Parliament of Religions.

Notwithstanding failures of nerve and imagination, the Parliament’s organizers, it is fair to say, acted remarkably by inviting “a variety of spiritual leaders from around the world . . . to share their perspectives and engage in dialogue” (World Parliament of Religions, 2015a). Planned by individuals aligned with Transcendentalism, an offshoot of American Unitarianism, itself shaped alongside liberal Congregationalism and deeply influenced by Romanticism and by the Biblical scholarship of Herder and Schleiermacher (Goodman, 2011), the Parliament reflected liberal 19th-century sensibilities driving or attempting to drive social change in the United States. In summing up the meaning of the Parliament, Max Müller compared it to his own scholarship in comparative religions, work that aspired to encourage appreciation for spiritual beliefs and systems outside of Christianity.

Many contemporary critics, however, considered the organizers, including Barrows, Christocentric. Following the Parliament, which categorically failed to achieve consensus regarding the superiority of Christianity among the religions of the world, Barrows undertook a rehabilitation of his reputation as a Christian exceptionalist by embarking on a widely publicized global missionary tour culminating in South Asia.

“I will speak for historic and non-sectarian Christianity,” he told an audience before departing. “My idea is not to present a fully developed system of Christianity, but to hold up Christ as the ideal, and to show that Christ is the fulfillment [sic] of all the best aspirations, and loftiest truths of the non-Christian nations”:

I will teach that Christianity presents the only scheme of redemption from sin and that is effective and satisfying. I will hold that other religions teach important ethical truths, but that these truths are all summed up in Christ, who is the one leader and only Savior of men.

At the Parliament of Religions many things were said against Christendom, but no criticism was made on Jesus Christ. His name stands out peerless and supreme, and will yet be the one watchword and

rallying cry of all who come to believe in the brotherhood of man, and the fatherhood of God.

Buddhism does not satisfy the chief need of the soul, which is the deliverance from the love and guilt of sin. Buddha was pessimistic. The Buddhist nations have never been the chief nations of the earth, and the laws of progress and of hope have not belonged to their life. (*The New York Times*, 1896d, p. 12)

A notice published in *The New York Times* on February 21, 1896, stated he would be sailing in the next week “to conduct the lectureship in India, as endowed by Mrs. [Caroline E.] Haskell,” who had donated money for that purpose to the University of Chicago (p. 8). Staying in New York before setting sail, Barrows delivered to Presbyterians a talk titled “India Lectureship and the Triumph of Christianity.” A February 25, 1896 *New York Times* headline announced that on this tour he “Will Not Discuss Indian Philosophy But Sets Forth Truths Centered in the Christian Religion” (p. 16).

It can be inferred that many Christian readers were pleasantly surprised to discover that Barrows had undertaken this reparatory work. He had been an unlikely favorite among American Baptists insofar as he was a Northerner instrumental in organizing the pantheistic and at times atheistic Parliament. An article published in *The Atlanta Constitution* on October 13, 1902, three months after his death at the age of 55, suggested that not only had Barrow’s subsequent missionary work abroad restored him to the good graces of certain conservative Christians, but the Parliament continued to trouble some of these same individuals nearly a decade after it concluded. “When the world’s parliaments [sic] of religion was held in Chicago I was opposed to it,” stated the evangelist Ostrum to his audience of about 1,000 Baptist men:

I said the expressions about Mohammedism and Hindooism given there would mean a misrepresentation of Christianity before the young men of America. But when John Henry Barrows came back from India after delivering the Haskell lectures, I said thank God for the parliament of religions, because it brought John Henry Barrows so before the whole world that when he spoke everybody gave attention. (p. 9)

According to the speaker, Barrows had “repeatedly emphasized upon the thoughts of the people that the most reliable opinion in India and China and Japan agreed with the most reliable opinion in Great Britain and America that the only hope of this lost world is the Christian Christ” (p. 9).

Three years after the World Parliament of Religions took place, a *New York Times* review of *Eight Lectures by the Swami: Vivekananda on Karma Yoga* exemplifies the enduring skepticism directed by Christian Americans towards practitioners of “foreign” religions. This review, published in a newspaper read by the nation’s elite, concluded, “Vainly you wander through the many pages found in this volume, which has no possible connection of thought, which teaches nothing, which maunders on in a swash of words, and lands you nowhere. Why should

anyone read such drivel? You can blow soap bubbles, and that is a harmless occupation, and such is the function of the Vedanta Society” (*The New York Times*, 1896c, p. 10).

One of the last mentions of the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in *The Atlanta Constitution* is that of a journalist writing under the headline “Buddhists Are Menace Says Religious Worker” (1912, p. B2). The author expressed disgust that Bibles in the United States were being printed in 70 foreign languages, including four Indian languages, and were being distributed among laborers on the West Coast. He made a distinction between immigrant Indians and the visiting priests of India, the former, meek and neglected, the latter “educated,” “shrewd,” “subtle,” and “sagacious,” conducting “operations . . . in the drawing rooms of American women, giving breathing exercises”:

This venerated Hinduism has headquarters for its work in southern California at San Diego. There are 60,000 Hindus on the Pacific coast. There are twelve centers of Buddhist and Hindu propaganda there. These are at Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, Bakersfield, Vacaville and other principle cities. At San Jose there are two Buddhist temples, and one is at Oakland. At Los Angeles there is an institutional Buddhist work, somewhat on the lines of the Y.M.C.A. (*The Atlanta Constitution*, 1912, p. B2)

The author concluded, “The World Parliament of Religions, back in 1893 in connection with the World’s fair that year is responsible for the most dangerous men in this country today. These are the Hindu priests, who seek here to propagate the heathen faith of India” (p. B2). Commentary such as this illustrates the passionate responses occasioned by the Parliament, even decades after it had closed its doors and much of the White City had burned to the ground.

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