

World religions



Hinduism has been influencing American society and culture for well over one hundred years now. Its vocabulary has been incorporated into daily American with the adoption of words like yoga and mantra. In fact, so many Americans now practice some sort of yoga that there is a real possibility that future generations may come to believe that it is actually an American creation.

Hinduism was first introduced formally to American society by Swami Vivekananda as part of the World Parliament of Religions at the Chicago Worlds Fair in 1893. Prior to this, the teachings of Hinduism helped shape the ideas and themes used by writers such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Swami Vivekananda was a very charismatic representative for Hinduism in America. Even though he died only a few years after first coming to America, he was able to establish many societies dedicated to Advaita Vedanta, which is based on the teachings of Ramakrishna, an Indian saint. These various societies developed into several formal movements including the Self-realization Fellowship and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, more commonly known as the "Hare Krishnas". As immigration from India has increased over the years, Hindu temples have added to the varied architectural landscape of America. These temples are constructed in the style of temples from northern and southern India. They are blessed by Hindu priests and offer a safe haven for believers to escape the materialistic impulses that rule so much of American life. Hindu temples stand as a symbol of cultural acceptance and tolerance, adding to the cultural mosaic that makes up America. Orthodox Hindus, those conducting serious investigations of the Hindu religion with an eye on converting, as well as the simply curious are all welcome to visit the temple. This reality shows

that in some ways, Hinduism and American culture are a good fit.

Hinduism's tolerance for other religions has also affected culture in America.

Aside from influencing authors and artists, Advaita Vedanta's universalism has affected certain liberal leaning Christian churches. The "New Age" movement also can link directly to the tenets of Hinduism in regards to acceptance of other religious beliefs, the belief in a plurality of paths to enlightenment and a commitment to non-violence and pacifism.

While Hinduism has not grown to be a major religion in America in numbers of actual adherents, it has nonetheless had substantial influence. From art to architecture to the melding of religious thoughts, Hinduism has had a real impact on the American cultural landscape.