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## Race and Yoga

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***Race and Yoga: A Grassroots and Feminist Publication***

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A grassroots and feminist publication, *Race and Yoga* only exists because women dreamed up, believed in, and labored for this project. *Race and Yoga* initially began as a working group, which I founded in 2011 while still a doctoral student at the University of California, Berkeley (UC-Berkley). At the time, I was practicing and teaching yoga in California Bay Area studio spaces and working as a yoga instructor at Alameda County Juvenile Hall sharing the practice with incarcerated youth. I wanted to have critical discussions with others about the politics, possibilities, and violences of yoga to gain insights which I hoped would help me become a more responsible and effective yoga teacher. The Race and Yoga working group brought together people – many of whom were yoga teachers and practitioners outside of academia – who likewise desired to have these conversations.

The female leadership structure for *Race and Yoga* was never by design, but it was women who were compelled to come forward and take on uncompensated labor to further the field of critical yoga studies. As much of the scholarship in *Race and Yoga* points out, yoga is a gendered practice, so too is academic service, and our journal straddles these intersections.



**Figure 1** – *Race and Yoga* Working Group Facilitators and Journal Editors, Drs. Tria Blu Wakpa, Jennifer Musial, and Sabrina Strings, at the 2016 Race & Yoga Conference at Mills College, Oakland, California.

In 2014, our fledging working group, funded by UC-Berkeley's Center for Race and Gender, began to thrive when I met Dr. Sabrina Strings who was then a UC-Berkeley Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow. Together, with the relentless support of Dr. Jennifer Musial, we held two conferences at UC-Berkeley (2014) and Mills College (2016). Believing in the Race and Yoga working group from the very beginning, Musial has also been instrumental to the journal's operation.

Our dreams did not end there; in 2016, our first issue of *Race and Yoga* went live with Musial serving as Managing Editor and Strings and I as Co-Editors-in-Chiefs. In 2022, I became sole Editor-in-Chief, and our board grew to include two Consulting Editors, Sheena Sood and Sandhya Kalyanasundaram; two Editorial Assistants, Ali Kheradyar and Sammy Roth; a Social Media Coordinator, Lauren Hatch Pokhrel, and a Book Review Editor, Samantha Griggs. For this issue of *Race and Yoga*, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) doctoral candidate and student worker, Arpit Gaiind, also served as an Editorial Assistant, copyediting a personal narrative. But otherwise, this issue came together entirely because of women without whom it would be impossible to do this work.

From its origins, Race and Yoga's leadership has sought to practice our politics, recognizing that it is not only the finished publication that is political, but also how we move through this world. Race and Yoga working group hosted conferences with keynote speakers that cost little to attend – e.g. five dollars a person – to nothing, and we still managed to feed our guests. In 2016, in response to a UC labor union speaker's boycott urge until UC-Berkeley improved its conditions for subcontracted workers (Logue 2016), we held our conference at Mills College, and in 2022, when UC graduate students went on strike demanding better pay and benefits, we withheld that year's journal issue (Associated Press 2022). In 2023, when we published an issue of the journal following the UC graduate students' strike, *Race and Yoga* Editorial Assistant and UCLA doctoral candidate, Sammy Roth wrote the issue's introduction, "Reigniting Race and Yoga: An Open Issue 'in the Wake' of Ongoing Crisis" (2023), which describes not only the strike, but also the genocide Israel and the US continue to commit against Palestinians.

Given Race and Yoga's commitment to enacting social justice, we made the journal open access from the get-go, so articles and narratives could freely circulate, traversing the academy and off-campus communities. For nearly a decade, our Editorial Board and Managing Editor have consistently provided thorough feedback to authors, even those whose writing we decide not to send out for peer review. When Musial sends essays out for peer review, she relies on a database of reviewers, who are almost entirely women scholars and primarily women of color. Recognizing that society often obscures and marginalizes women's work, we have documented *Race and Yoga's* origin story now more than once – see the Introduction to our 2016 issue, "Rethinking Yoga: Meditations on the Work We Do" (Strings and Blu Wakpa). We have also created and bestowed titles upon the graduate students who work with us to describe and make their labor visible. Despite operating on a nearly non-existent budget, *Race and Yoga* still manages to make magic happen, like women often do.

Recently, I have reflected on how over the years, *Race and Yoga* journal has assembled a powerful archive of voices, perspectives, insights, and images, and the essays in this open issue – which geographically span South Africa, China, the US, and Kwakwaka'wakw territories (Canada) – enhance and expand the existing collection.

This issue begins with Firdose Moonda's personal narrative, "Decolonizing Yoga Through an Intersectional Analysis in the Indian Diaspora: A South African Story," which

highlights the diversity and complexity of her positionality as an Indian person of Muslim roots, which many non-Indian, yoga practitioners and teachers tend to overlook. The author challenges the widespread assumptions that all Indian people are the same through the lens of her lived experiences growing up in South Africa in the late Apartheid era. She discusses the nuances of Indian identities as well as the privilege and discrimination she has faced and witnessed in and beyond yoga spaces. These interactions and her knowledge of yoga history and philosophy provide a foundation for her to critique essentialist statements about yoga – such as the practice equates to “social justice” – and begin to chart a history of yoga in South Africa. Ultimately, the author concludes by offering a framework of “decolonizing yoga,” which centers “remembering,” “reimagining,” and “questioning with the intention of developing greater understanding.”

Through another personal narrative, Gabriella Filomena Buttarazzi’s “China, Higher Education, and an Integral Approach: Inclusive Practice through the Creation and Implementation of a Staff Yoga Program,” reflects on her experiences founding and operating yoga classes at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China from 2014-2019. The author recognizes how academia can produce mind-body dualism and “nihilistic, destructive” thinking. Instead, Buttarazzi positions yoga as a holistic practice that has the potential to alleviate mind-body disconnect and negative thoughts through “expanding individual and collective consciousness through contemplation, introspection, reflection, and connection with oneself, with others, and the world/beyond” (12). The author delineates the inescapable contradictions of yoga, which she considered in creating a staff yoga program that leveraged institutional support to make the cost of yoga accessible to a racially and economically diverse campus community. Building on these understandings, she offers an “integral approach” framework, which acknowledges that all practitioners and cultures are valuable and strives for pedagogical flexibility so that varied influences can shape and strengthen the curriculum.

The issue continues with Jessica Barudin’s “Weaving Threads of Collective Liberation: Cross-Cultural Healing Among Indigenous and South Asian Women,” which discusses the origins and aims of the Indigenous Yoga Collective based in Kwakwaka’wakw territories in Canada’s Pacific Northwest. A collaboration between Indigenous and South Asian women, the Indigenous Yoga Collective “addresses the shared traumas of colonial oppression while promoting the reconnection of body, mind, spirit, and land” (20) and focuses on healing and nurturing cross-cultural relationships. Like Buttarazzi’s “China, Higher Education, and an Integral Approach” which again advocates for an “integral approach” as a framework for creating inclusive yoga spaces, Barudin presents a paradigm for “decolonial wellness frameworks that resist cultural commodification and build reciprocal relationships” (20). The Indigenous Yoga Collective’s decolonial praxis is an important intervention given the ways that enduring colonization has detrimentally impacted Native peoples’ holistic practices and connection to their lands, and settler yoga discourses often marginalize South Asian yoga practitioners and teachers. Members of the Indigenous Yoga Collective express that the experience has been transformative for them, and given its success, the group plans to expand their program in the future.

Concluding this issue is Sarah Schrank’s essay, “The Trouble with Wellness,” which reviews three recent books that articulate the politics of wellness in the US and intersect with yoga in various ways: Kerri Kelly’s *American Detox: The Myth of Wellness and How We Can Truly Heal* (2022), Christy Harrison’s *The Wellness Trap: Break Free from Diet Culture, Disinformation, and Dubious Diagnoses – and Find Your True Well-Being* (2023), and Derek

Beres, Matthew Remski, and Julian Walker's *Conspirituality: How New Age Conspiracy Theories Became a Health Threat* (2023). The author finds that the books center wellness premised upon the experiences of healthy people and foreground individual experiences in lieu of structural critiques. Instead, Schrank argues that "the trouble with wellness" in the US is its intertwinement with capitalism and "the neoliberal promise of endless economic growth at the expense of people, the environment, and, indeed, health" (36). The author conducts a brief literature review to illuminate the racialized and gendered histories, politics, and conflicts surrounding the concept of "wellness" in the US. While acknowledging the commodification of wellness and the value of the books' critiques, Schrank also underscores that alternative medicine and wellness practices can provide people with welcome and vital interventions, particularly given widespread deficiencies in the US health care system.

We hope you read this issue with interest and glean inspiration. Although *Race and Yoga* has existed for nearly a decade, the field is still fresh and filled with possibility. Already in the works, our ninth issue – "Yoga in Global Muslim Contexts: Cultural Representations and Spiritual Practices" – will be guest edited by Drs. Farha Ternikar and Narin Hassan. *Race and Yoga*, a collective archive written and curated mostly by women, continues to document and shape the field of critical yoga studies as we look towards our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026.

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