

Oppression is Not a Yoga Pose: Upholding White Supremacy at Rainier Beach Yoga

*Written by Western Yoga is Fake Yoga
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“Laura Humpf braced herself for fresh salvos of death threats, rage-soaked slurs and indictments of ‘reverse racism’ from media provocateurs.” So reads an article recently published on the front page of Seattle’s largest newspaper. Sounds pretty bad, right? The only issue is that it’s completely misleading.

**How would you, the reader, feel if you knew that
there weren’t actually any death threats? No
“rage-soaked slurs”?**

This very problematic article with the click bait title of ‘*Seattle Yoga Teacher’s “Undoing Whiteness” Class: Founded on Deep Purpose, It’s Triggered Outrage*’ was recently

published on the front page of the Seattle Times (Seattle's primary newspaper). Written by a person of color (POC), and quoting a token POC throughout, the article depicts the white woman teacher of the class, Laura Humpf, as a victim of white supremacist hate who is bravely standing in the face of danger to fight for racial justice. Thanks to this article, Humpf is being praised and seen as a hero among left-leaning liberals, social justice circles and western yoga communities. Other media outlets picked up the story, it went viral on the internet, and was even discussed on National Public Radio.

How would you, the reader, feel if you knew that there weren't actually any death threats? No "rage-soaked slurs"? Because there weren't. This article is mostly nonsense but there are some small grains of truth and that's part of what makes it so insidious:

1. In 2015 Humpf did receive death threats from white supremacists when she offered her studio space to an outside group who taught yoga to POC.
2. In 2019 Humpf did receive a lot of criticism for this recent "undoing whiteness"--NOT from white supremacists but actually from the local leftist community.
3. In 2019 a handful of right wing trolls did mock the "undoing whiteness" class on social media and the story was briefly picked up by a right wing radio show host. However, this trolling never escalated into death threats or widespread white supremacist hate. It turns out that white supremacists don't really care if there is a class just for white people. They cared in 2015 because it was a POC *only* class.

If you read the Seattle Times article carefully and think about the examples shown of the "rage-soaked" comments Humpf received, you might notice that these comments are not things that white supremacists would say, nor are they "rage-soaked".

What is also true is that the local leftist community, with a significant amount of POC, made three main critiques of her class:

1. The hypocrisy of using a culturally appropriating yoga class to “undo whiteness.”
2. A white person leading and profiting from a white caucus space, excluding POC while having no accountability.
3. The fact that Humpf and Rainier Beach Yoga is participating in the gentrification of the Rainier Beach neighborhood.

White people culturally appropriating a South Asian tradition to detox from whiteness is a total absurdity.

The only reason that white supremacists attacked Humpf recently is because this Seattle Times article was published, in which Humpf participated, portraying herself as a white martyr for racial justice. You can scour the internet and search social media for yourself and you will see what we saw; prior to the Seattle Times article being published, most of the critiques were coming from the left wing local community and they were mostly valid critiques.

If you read the Seattle Times article carefully and think about the examples shown of the “rage-soaked” comments Humpf received, you might notice that these comments are not things that white supremacists would say, nor are they “rage-soaked”. One comment, which described the class as “embarking on a pub crawl to tackle alcoholism,” is a pretty good analogy. White people culturally appropriating a South Asian tradition to detox from whiteness is a total absurdity. Even in searching the comments for a prime example of the “white supremacist” criticism Humpf claimed to have received, the best the Seattle Times could do was to find a comment that is clearly from someone concerned about appropriation and present it out of context.

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Numerous people who are usually reliable allies *supported this article*. They were white people who should have known better and even some POC were fooled. The false narrative of the article combined with quotes from token POC tricked people into defending the article on social media. Meanwhile, Indigenous Hindus and South Asian Hindus in the diaspora continue to suffer the appropriation of their practices, the local POC community continues to be gentrified, and Humpf continues to uphold white supremacy and capitalism.

Humpf is not accountable to any lineage based Indigenous Hindus nor any lineage based South Asian Hindu diaspora. *You have to be accountable to people who come from within the impacted communities.*

Here are some of the many problems with that Seattle Times article and Humpf's class:

1. Centering Laura Humpf's white experience over focusing on real racial justice issues.
2. Contributing to gentrifying a POC neighborhood in Seattle.
3. Falsifying a narrative: There was no widespread white supremacist hate or death threats for this class prior to the Seattle Times article being published.
4. Falsifying a white supremacist narrative of criticism from the right *that covered up valid criticism from the left*.
5. Painting Humpf as a victim and therefore the hero white savior.

6. Exploiting a genuine fear of white supremacy that POC suffer by using a click bait article title to provoke sympathy for a white woman. Meanwhile, POC, who deserve far more sympathy due to *actual* white supremacists attacks are ignored.
7. Using community and resources to protect Humpf, a white woman, when those resources are needed by POC who face real systemic racism every day.
8. Taking space & voice that should have been given to the POC impacted (the author of the article is a non-South Asian POC while the article centers Humpf, a white woman fake yoga teacher).
9. Profiting from caucusing: While white caucus spaces can be valid, and having a white facilitator might be okay if they are genuinely accountable to POC organizers, white people should never profit from such racial justice work without a transparent accountability process.
10. Culturally appropriating yoga: Humpf is a white teacher with no authentic yoga lineage. She did her yoga teacher training through The Samarya Center and is profiting from distorting an ancient Indigenous South Asian practice that comes from Hindus. The now defunct Samarya Center, by the way, was run by Molly Lannon Kenny, another white woman who has no authentic teacher or lineage and made up her own “yoga” style and trademarked it for profit.
11. Charging money for culturally appropriated classes while getting free publicity from the Seattle Times article and subsequent media, ultimately profiting off of it even more; Humpf promoted her business very successfully using the guise of suffering white supremacist attacks.
12. Using cultural appropriation as a guise to “undo whiteness”, thereby distorting the true meaning of dismantling whiteness and racial justice.
13. Pretending like she isn’t culturally appropriating yoga so she can keep profiting from it: The class was originally advertised as “Yoga” but after getting criticism Humpf changed the description and took all but one mention of “yoga” out of the class material. This means she KNOWS she’s a cultural appropriator but will not stop appropriating.
14. Tokenizing POC (Humpf’s supposed mentor), while not being accountable to the South Asian people yoga is culturally appropriated from, or even the POC in the neighborhood Humpf is gentrifying. This pits POC against each other and divides the racial justice movement.
15. False accountability: On her website Humpf lists two POC she is accountable to while doing this work, Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams and Leticia Nieto. Neither of them are part of the Indigenous South Asian communities that are impacted by the cultural appropriation of yoga. Nieto doesn’t appear to be a yoga teacher at all. While Kyodo Williams is Buddhist and Buddhism does have a claim to Buddhist/Tantra yoga, Humpf teaches a version of *Ashtanga* yoga, which comes

from Hinduism, which is indigenous to South Asia. Williams and Nieto's mentorship is therefore irrelevant. Humpf is not accountable to any lineage based Indigenous Hindus nor any lineage based South Asian Hindu diaspora. *You have to be accountable to people who come from within the impacted communities.* This tactic of using a token POC to cover up the harm caused to other POC is a colonizer's "divide and conquer" tactic and it is violent.

16. Distorting Indigenous practice: As the Seattle Times article points out, Humpf has her students making up poses inspired by words she shouts out such as "Oppression" or "Justice". "Oppression" and "Justice" are not yoga poses, and you can't just make up *asana* to serve your own agenda. This shows total disrespect for the indigenous practice she's profiting from and is actually potentially physically dangerous.
17. Disconnecting intention from approach: This is assuming that Humpf had a positive intention to do anti-racism work. Her approach to appropriate yoga *asana*, profit from it, and gain publicity, is as non-yogic as can be.
18. Perpetuating Hinduphobia: Humpf shows no sign of caring about the Hindus directly harmed by her white entitlement and cultural appropriation.
19. Justifying cultural appropriation that feeds the western yoga industrial complex feeds capitalism, and feeds the ongoing colonization of Hindu culture and other South Asian traditions.
20. White people teaching yoga for money without permission or guidance from an authentic lineage is an example of white supremacy; Humpf gives examples of white supremacy showing up in yoga spaces but doesn't see that she is the white supremacist.

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own agenda.**

As you can see, there are so many problems with Humpf's class and the Seattle Times article. It's difficult to even fully grasp the scope of the harm that has been caused. Those supporting this class and the Seattle Times article are upholding white supremacy and furthering the oppression of Indigenous people and POC. The result is that we all move further away from collective liberation and accountability.

However, when we think deeper about this, it makes sense that the wider social justice community is showing sympathy to Humpf instead of Hindus and other Indigenous people and the gentrified POC community who are harmed by Humpf's actions. If they were to see this Seattle Times article and the "undoing whiteness" class for what it really is, people on the left and in social justice communities would have to face uncomfortable truths about themselves, their own cultural appropriation of yoga, *and their own Hinduphobia*. Hinduphobia is everywhere, even in the social justice community. The numbers of people who have committed this harm are vast. Are you one of them and do you want to change? If yes, we suggest you look up cultural appropriation and Hinduphobia and start dismantling your racism and bigotry.

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