

[Vivekananda - 100 Years Later](#)

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Published by Anonymous on Apr. 02, 1993

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Hindus Rally Around the Monk Who Stunned Chicago's 1893 World Parliament of Religions

It happened in Chicago, September, 1893. As dawn broke, a saffron-robed, penniless figure crawled out of a abandoned wooden crate in the filthy Chicago railway freight-yards. Thirty-year-old Vivekananda had lost the address of the host party for the Oriental delegates to the 1893 World Parliament of Religions being staged by the World's Fair. Stoically, he wandered through this industrial beehive of factories and meat slaughter houses asking for help. The "colored" foreigner won cold rebuke. By afternoon, he ended up in a fashionable residential area. Exhausted, he sat down on the streetside. While pondering his predicament, a finely dressed woman approached him and inquired if he was a delegate to the Parliament and possibly needed help.

Her name was Mrs. George Hale. She and her husband "adopted" the Indian yogi, and two days later Swami Vivekananda, bathed and rested, stood before a packed hall of 7,000 and began, "Sisters and Brothers of America." "Sisters" came first to honor womankind, for it was women's compassion that rescued him, he later shared. As an avalanche of inner force poured into his words, the audience rose and interrupted him with thunderous applause. The monk's simple but powerful spiritual presence overwhelmed them.

Swami Vivekananda stayed in America for three years, hammering home the highest Hindu perceptions - God pervades all life, we are all brothers/sisters, all paths to the Supreme are good and to be respected. Christian preachers baited and barked at him, but he subdued them with the all-embracing Hindu vision, often paraphrasing his own Parliament speech: 'Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me' [Bhagavad Gita]. Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They filled the

earth with violence and sent whole nations to despair. I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning may be the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feeling between persons winding their way to the same goal." He returned to India a national hero, continued the tireless work inspired in him by his guru Sri Ramakrishna and left his mortal frame in 1901 at only 38.

Today, Vivekananda stands as a formidable beacon as multihued as the Hindu fabric itself. For one person, he is simply the shining, sun-like renunciate ever serving God by spreading the dharma. To another he is the diamond light of Self-Realization. To another he is the first fighter for Indian self-rule. To another he is Bharat's greatest social worker, a motherly servant of the downtrodden and powerless. To women, he is the bold soul who proclaimed the gentle sex lacks nothing, reminding a narrow-minded brahmin caste that women once enjoyed the fullest religious position and expression during the Vedic period. For youth, he is the champion of idealism, of setting the highest goal and never cowering or compromising in its attainment. He told the youth to be leaders, reminding them that Hinduism is old because it is youthful, fearless, flexible. He charged them to guard it from getting tired, tyrannized by dogma or hollowed by unenlightened convention.

For two years, begun in December, 1991, and culminating September, 1993, Hindu organizations worldwide, most notably the Vishva Hindu Parishad, are honoring Swami Vivekananda for bringing Advaita to the West and breathing new vitality into an ancient way of life. The VHP's finale is a World Vision 2000 Conference in Washington D.C., August 6-8, designed to initiate a new century of Hindu fortitude and deepened commitment to social service.

Another event, largely inspired by Vivekananda's historic presence at the 1893 Parliament, is the 1993 World Parliament of Religions, being staged in Chicago Aug. 28th-Sept. 5th. The grandly conceived event is bringing together a forum of distinguished personalities from the world's multi-religious family - notably including delegates from less prominent faiths such as Taoism, Shintoism and the indigenous faiths such as the Native American Religion. Through close dialogue and formal addresses, the august assembly will be entreated to unite as spiritual brothers and proceed into the 21st era as peacekeepers and earthkeepers. An enthusiastic Hindu Host Committee is now fund-raising boldly asking all Hindus to help make this once-in-a-century event as significant as the 1893 parliament. To contribute or get information call: Mrs. Avanti Gutta (708) 655-0318.

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