

>> Testing the captioning.

(Standing by).

Testing the captioning.

(Standing by).

>> Recording in progress.

>> What do you think of when you think of yoga?

Poses on a mat?

Perfect alignment?

>> Take a big breath in.

>> Reaching far beyond your toes?

The beauty of yoga is that it's much more than a sequence.

>> Thank you so much for joining us.

>> Yoga is asana and also activism. Yoga is about a quiet, internal journey. And a growing powerful outward voice. Yoga is action, curiosity, empathy, join us as we celebrate yoga. The diversity of millions who practice it, and the power it gives us all. Because we are all for yoga, and yoga is all for us.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Hello and welcome to this continuing education workshop event with Yoga Alliance. You'll see a location poll popping up on the screen. We invite you to share where you're joining us from today. Very happy to have you here. As you're filling out the poll, I'll share a little bit of information for today's event. We are recording this workshop. As attendees, you can see and you can hear, but you cannot be seen or heard by others in attendance. If you have questions or comments, please direct them to the Q&A function, and we will be coming back later in the session to quick up questions and provide some answers. We'll respond to as many as possible. That said, we've got a lot of folks here today. So, if we're not able to get to your question, apologies in advance, but we will work through as many as we can. One last note, this workshop is being recorded and will be made available on Yoga Alliance's archive at the end of the week. So, with that, I am going to do an official introduction and welcome. My name is Kristina Graff. My pronouns are she and her, and I'm the managing director at the Yoga Alliance Foundation. And very honored and humbled to be part of this special event today. This is a continuing education workshop, and we're doing a live watch of the groundbreaking documentary The Uncommon Yogi: A History of Blacks and Yoga in the U.S. We're so glad to be joined by the documentary's creator and executive director and co-founder of the Black Yoga Teachers Alliance, Jana Long. We're going to screen the documentary, and afterwards, Jana will be doing a live Q&A session. That's where we'll go back to the questions and answers that are put in the box throughout the documentary or afterwards. And we will provide through Jana different resources and guidance on integration of this information that will be covered into yoga teaching. So, with that, I'm going to do an introduction of Jana and then hand off to her. Jana Long is the executive director and cofounder of the Black Yoga Teachers Alliance, a community service membership organization that is established to provide continuing education, professional development, and representation for Black yoga teachers. She is also the director and lead teacher of Power One Yoga Center, a community-based wellness space in Baltimore, Maryland that offers a comprehensive style of yoga to help people classified as baby boomers to inspire health and wellness

along the continuum of aging. Meditation facilitator, state of Maryland certified master gardener, and mentor to many. Jana has learned and studies yoga with teachers and scholars of diverse lineages and cultures in Africa, India, Central America, and the United States. And her personal yoga practice spans more than 50 years. So, with that, Jana, I will hand over to you. I'm so grateful to have you with us today.

>> JANA LONG: Oh, that was so lovely. Thank you, Kristina. Good morning. It's really a pleasure to be here. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to talk about the uncommon yogi. And I want to extend my welcome to everyone who has joined us this morning because there are many virtual events to choose from and so I'm really grateful that you have chosen to be with us this morning. So, welcome and thank you.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Thank you, Jana. And Cybill, I think we're ready to start the film!

>> JANA LONG: I'll add this will be a treat for me. I haven't watched the Uncommon Yogi in quite a while. (Chuckling).

There we go.

I'm not hearing the sound.

(Music).

>> We know little about the spiritual practices that enslaved Africans brought to America, but we know from the music they created, their dance, narratives, and religious beliefs that they were a deeply spiritual people who adapted their inherent beliefs to a European cosmology. The history of yoga practice among Black people in the United States is moving out of the shadows and into the light. Observable and documented. A living legacy with ancient beginnings in Africa, to its origins in the United States in the early part of the 20th century.

(Music).

On March 3rd, 1820, the Missouri Compromise Bill, sponsored by Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky passed in the United States Congress. This legislation admitted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state. The nation was now comprised of 22 states, 11 free, 11 slave. The compromise also forbade slavery from all new territory north of the Missouri. Cotton had become the dominant cash crop in the agricultural economy of the South. It fueled the northern factories.

It was of paramount importance to the economies of the United States and Great Britain.

Crucial to this economy was the free and enforced labor of millions of enslaved Africans in the United States.

Transcendentalism as an American literary, political, and philosophical movement developed in the 1820s and 1830s by a small group of New England thinkers. The leaders were Emerson and Thoreau.

They incorporated world scriptures into their writings into this new movement. In several essays Emerson popularized the metaphysical belief that the human being and God and everything parties baited in one being. They protested against slavery in various ways, but for the most part the transcendentalists were primarily comprised of college educated New Englanders. Alcott and Whitman. None of them had any significant connections to or interactions with the enslaved population.

The Theosophical Society was founded. The society's motto was there is no religion higher than truth. They wanted to understand the mysterious origins and interconnectedness between the universe, humanity, and the divine.

Madam Blavatsky's opus was published in 1838. It is the major work of theosophy. Blavatsky and Alcott who served as the first president moved to India, where they established the first international

headquarters in a suburb of Madras. It was closely linked to the Indian independence movement and established headquarters across the street from the Indian national Congress. The Congress was founded in 1885 by Indian and British members of the movement. Including Hume. Associations developed between the leaders of both organizations.

After the first world war Mahatma Gandhi became the president of the Congress, and he remained the leader and icon until his death by assassination in January 1948, employing the principle of ahimsa or non-violence, Gandhi led India to independence. Martin Luther King, Jr., was heavily informed by Gandhi's leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-20th century. Blavasty is recognized as the greatest occultist in Western. And the discovery. Other groups arose from teachings loosely based on the theosophical doctrines, such as the ascended master teachings, the I am activity advanced by former theosophist Bailey, which continues today. It formed the foundation of the present day New Age Movement.

Vivekananda was the first Hindu to travel to the United States. With the assistance of a professor from Harvard, he was invited to speak at the 1893 Congress of World Religions in Chicago as part of the World's Fair. He introduced the philosophies of yoga to the Western World. Annie Besant became president of the Theosophical Society in 1909, at the same time the Association for the Advancement of Colored People by W.E.B. Dubois. They were the only two Americans invited to attend the Universal Race Conference in London. The goal was to discuss race relations between East and West. There is evidence to discussion that theosophical ideology developed among Black people as they migrated from the South. Figures such as Divine and Sweet Daddy Grace, and the organization of groups such as Church of the Living God and Black Free masonry were concepts filtered into the spiritual philosophy of several Black religions. Ali migrated from the South. He settled in Newark, New Jersey. He joined the theosophical philosophy, which included Webb.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Thank you, Cybill. Apologies to everyone watching. And thank you for using the Q&A box to flag the visuals issue. We are trying to address it now. We're just going to do some live – in the event. I saw a note in the Q&A that what may be causing the gray boxes that are obstructing some of the views may be viewing other windows open on the screen, like looking at the Q&A or something. So, Cybill, if you're comfortable, we can try it again and see what happens if you minimize the other windows you have open when playing the video.

And again, apologies to everyone, especially Jana. I'm sorry to interrupt the screening. We do want to get it right. So, thanks for patience as we work this one out.

And Cybill, I'd say whenever you're ready, you can close out any Q&A or chat boxes that are open. Let's see if that fixes it. And then you can try pressing play again.

Oh yeah. It could be the captioning also, the captioning not coming through.

>> JANA LONG: We were just getting to the good part! (Chuckling)

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: And Jana, you said you haven't watched – I see we're back in. I still see the gray boxes. Let's see.

Okay, we're going to try again. One moment.

>> CYBILL VALENTINE: I'm going to interrupt and talk. I don't have any windows open and I don't see any gray boxes. I've just asked the captioner maybe not to caption anymore. I'm not sure if that makes a difference. The only thing that's showing on my screen from the video is the toolbar that let's me share the screen. I'm going to try to move that. Let's just see if that makes a difference. Okay? I'm very sorry to everyone.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Thanks, Cybill.

>> JANA LONG: Thank you!

>> JANA LONG: Maybe just go back a tad bit to where we were getting into India. That's far enough. That's far enough.

Yeah.

(Standing by).

>> JANA LONG: Wow!

You know, I had to look up, this was made in 2016.

And I wanted to check and make sure Sonny Rawlins was still alive, and he is. He is now 92 years old. His yoga practice has served him well!

(Laughter).

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Jana, thank you so much. It has been really thrilling to watch the comments coming in through the Q&A. So, much celebration. And so much appreciation. There was a request for a part two.

>> JANA LONG: It's coming! It's coming!

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: It is coming?

>> JANA LONG: Yes, I'm working on a part two to this. It's in development. Let's put it that way.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: That is so good. And I know, again, I want to thank everyone for incredible patience and reminding us all to take a breath through a bumpy start technically. We did put the link to the full documentary.

I want to start with a few questions. One was again the appreciation of hearing these powerful stories of Black Americans' experience with yoga and impact with yoga on the practice and how it was woven within the broader historical context. It was really powerful. There were multiple comments and questions about how this content could be incorporated or even required in teacher training so everyone has access. And we've talked about this before, how this is very important context for yoga education and for the curriculum. And at the same time, we know there's a real risk of causing harm if implication – education or sharing is done poorly. Would love to hear your thoughts on a thoughtful and informed approach to those who want to share this documentary, this content with their communities.

>> JANA LONG: I think the content in this video, it's a starting point.

You know, there are lots of, I was careful as I wrote the script to include both sides of the story.

When we were in the segment about during enslavement, for example, that people who enforced that, that they are identified. Because very often the story is told lopsided, because it depends on who is telling the story. But I wanted the picture to be comprehensive. And also to be a place where you could find references to study more, to just select a name. For example, if you were interested in learning more about Madam Blavatsky and that trip and the Indian National Congress. You could Google a name. That's why I made sure to include photographs, archival photographs where I could find them and to identify the players. But Spatyaya is one of the principles of yoga. It's very important. We've got to do our homework. And I know right now we're living in a time where information is instantaneous and it's digital, but it's not rich. It's not rich. You've got to do your homework. You've got to practice it. And also, something that occurred to me as I watched the video again, it was a little garbled in the beginning, but it starts off with a comment that says if a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound? And I started the video that way because see eyes weren't on Black people,

except our own eyes. So, we know that things are happening and developing amongst us or in our communities, our churches, our schools, our neighborhoods, whatever, that because a dominant eye isn't noticing it, looking at it, doesn't mean it didn't exist. That's what I'm saying about yoga. And even now. I tried to show that there is a trajectory, the same trajectory as yoga coming into the United States where everyone. You know, it wasn't just Black people who weren't practicing yoga in the 1800s, 1900s, early 20th century. It was everybody. But there was no focus on us. I'm including myself in that "us." When I say "us," I'm talking about Black people. There was no focus on us, but it doesn't mean it didn't exist. And that's what the film is about or what the video is about to show that as yoga came into the United States and its various iterations and movements and different Indian teachers, primarily I would say the most important in touching into the Black community was Yoga Nanda who actually hosted African American groups as he traveled. Because of segregation, Black people may not have been – may not, were not – admitted to some of the events, some of the lectures that he did. But he took the opportunity to go into the community and do his lectures for those audiences. And that's some of the continuing research, for example, that I've been involved in. In particular is researching his talk to that group in 1926 in Washington, D.C. I actually found the location where it happened and I'm drilling down a little more.

So, this is a documentary. I wanted it to be accessible to everyone. It's on YouTube.

Because at the time I developed it, I actually had done all this research to write an article. I worked at a newspaper at the time and I thought, oh, it would be really cool to write an article about how did Black people get to practicing yoga. I even looked into my own family. Why did this practice appeal to me? It didn't appeal to anybody else in my family? But what was it? I maintained a connection to it. As I did that research, I began to look on the internet to see what history I could find about Black people and yoga. And mostly what was out there, if you put Black and yoga together was parody, some of it quite insulting. Nothing serious. Nothing to learn anything from. But then I had so much research. It was turning into a book. And I'm not a long writer. I like to get in there and out when I'm writing something. So, I was able to create that documentary in iMovie. Yeah, that's an iMovie production, by the way. (Laughing) And that's one of my loves. I love video film production, film editing. It was a dream that I had that I never realized. But I'm realizing it now in this way. But yeah.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: I'm going to jump in really quickly. I'm sorry to interrupt. I know that we're at the hour mark. However, if you are available to continue for a few more minutes, we can for whoever can share. If you're not, that's okay. But I wanted to acknowledge that if we've got a little more time, I know we had some bumps. Do you have five more minutes?

>> JANA LONG: Yeah, I have five more minutes. Sure.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Awesome. So, you made it in iMovie.

>> JANA LONG: Yeah, I made it in iMovie. It's not the definitive history. That's why it's "a" history of Blacks in yoga; it's not definitive. So, now if you want to use this information in a yoga teacher training, or in your classes, you have a starting point. And if there is some part of it that is of interest to you, hopefully you have enough reference material: Names, dates, locations, et cetera, to dig down a little deeper for yourself.

And I'm very happy that people are using the video to further the yoga education and yoga teacher trainings and to make that more open and inclusive to show that no, we've been here all along. Maybe not in great numbers, but that's a recent development in yoga that great numbers of people practicing yoga is relatively 21st century.

(Laughter). You know. That's some new stuff. And I can say that as someone who started practicing

yoga, became aware of yoga in 1972.

That it looked nothing like it looks now.

So many people practicing yoga and coming to it is very late 20th century into the 21st century. And certainly the participation of Black people in yoga is a 21st century, in larger numbers, is a 21st century occurrence.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Well, and Jana, I love so many things about this. Your If a tree falls and no one hears it, your explanation of that has me in full-body chills. The recognition of where a lens is turned and amplified and where it's not. First and foremost, I want to say thank you for turning the lens and sharing with us. Because there's so many people here with us today and there's so much celebration in the Q&A.

>> JANA LONG: (Chuckling) Let me look! I got to look!

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: And we're going to record it. And I'm going to ask a question, too, which is if there are any questions that we're not able to answer today, if we can follow up with you for some of the answers and bring the discussion over to YA Community.

>> JANA LONG: Yeah, write to me!

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: All right. We'll basically compile the questions that are still there. There's going to be a recording of this event circulated, as well, as a discussion guide. Anything you want to say about the discussion guide for viewing the documentary?

>> JANA LONG: Yeah, we didn't get into it. Some of that – thank you Kristina, for what you said about the lens, where the lens is focused. I think you said it much better than I did. And that is exactly what I mean.

So, the documentary sort of starts talking about these folks we call African Americans who were in Africa at the time, who were they? Because now we are identified as African Americans, but one thing that is really important to understand is the people who were brought here, our ancestors who were enslaved were very diverse people. Even within the same land masses. They were of different ethnicities, languages, culture, cultural expressions, spiritual beliefs. And they all kind of got lumped into ships together. This would be the same as say you go to Europe and you don't see any difference between French, Italian, Swedish, you know, it's the same thing. I mean multitudes of very different people, different ethnic groups. And we're still those people.

I like to say nowadays in this conversation, for example, around trauma-informed yoga. And that's a good thing. But I always look if the trauma is sort of an ancestral imprint, then so is the opposite of that trauma an ancestral imprint. And I think what has helped Black people survive and thrive and move forward is that opposite, yeah, the trauma is there quite evident. But what was it that helped them to overcome? It was the imprint of those cultural and spiritual practices, their ways of being. And very important, their connection to the earth. There are many parallels between Theodic philosophy and even Hinduism and African spirituality, especially this idea of one creator, the one source, and the appreciation and honoring of different deities and those deities representing the powers of the earth. Those same elements of that are in African spiritualties that are in the Eastern spiritualties. So, all of that migrates to the West when Africans are brought. So, along with the trauma of experience was also that deeply ancestral imprint of spirit and culture that came with them. So, we can't forget that. And it still is within us. And I would say for Africans brought to America, clearly a great deal of that has captured the world, has been through the music and the dance as spiritual expression, not entertainment. Because dance has meaning in those expressions. It's not just moving for the sake of

moving. There is information and ways of being and ways of living and spiritual elevation and spiritual possession that is involved in that. And anybody knows that, you know, you get a group of Black people together and you start playing something that has a beat, some drums, we immediately possess, we start bobbing our heads, patting our feet. You can't help it. And that was also some of why music was segregated in the United States. It's a form of possession.

And so all of those, we brought that with us and that's helped us to endure.

Helped to endure.

So, we can't forget that.

And I think that, you know, for me that's the importance. As the co-founder of Black Yoga Teachers Alliance, we get a lot of mail that has sort of a hateful tone to it about being Black and practicing yoga, and maybe not practicing it in this prescribed way that it is taught that is supposed to be the way it was taught in India. But if you notice both Yoga Nanda and Vivekananda, they were not practicing Asana. They were not going around the country doing Asana with groups. They were talking about a way of coming into your higher self. And you have to seek that higher self. It doesn't just appear. Some of us come into it early, but it's a lifetime seeking of your higher self and your connection to all that there is in this realm in which we live. And so, like I said, there was a great deal of understanding of that, maybe not through the lens of the thetas; the Africans had their own cosmology. But because we were disconnected from that, now here we are 21st century, now here is yoga, and here is a way to tap into that innate expression, an innate way of being, in a codified form. But it has to be adaptive to who we are.

And that's for everybody. To who we are. And it gives us the flexibility to be that and do that.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Wow. I feel like we could talk for another hour! (Chuckling) The thought and the journey and all of the research, but also deep love that went into this is so evident in the conversation. I know we need to wrap out of respect for your time and everyone who is here. But we will still continue the conversation on YA Community. Jana, thank you again so much. There will be a follow-up email and it's been an honor to be here with you today.

>> JANA LONG: Thank you so much. And oh my God, thank you, everyone, for all your wonderful comments. I swear, I have tears in my eyes. I'm trying to choke them back because it was a labor of love. And I really appreciate your appreciation of the Uncommon Yogi. Thank you, thank you.

>> KRISTINA GRAFF: Thank you, everyone.