



The American Soul Rush: Esalen and the Rise of Spiritual Privilege (Qualitative Studies in Religion)

Marion Goldman

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Yoga. Humanistic Psychology. Meditation. Holistic Healing. These practices are commonplace today. Yet before the early 1960s they were atypical options for most people outside of the upper class or small groups of educated spiritual seekers.

Esalen Institute, a retreat for spiritual and personal growth in Big Sur, California, played a pioneering role in popularizing quests for self-transformation and personalized spirituality. This “soul rush” spread quickly throughout the United States as the Institute made ordinary people aware of hundreds of ways to select, combine, and revise their beliefs about the sacred and to explore diverse mystical experiences. Millions of Americans now identify themselves as spiritual, not religious, because Esalen paved the way for them to explore spirituality without affiliating with established denominations

The American Soul Rush explores the concept of spiritual privilege and Esalen’s foundational influence on the growth and spread of diverse spiritual practices that affirm individuals’ self-worth and possibilities for positive personal change. The book also describes the people, narratives, and relationships at the Institute that produced persistent, almost accidental inequalities in order to illuminate the ways that gender is central to religion and spirituality in most contexts.

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