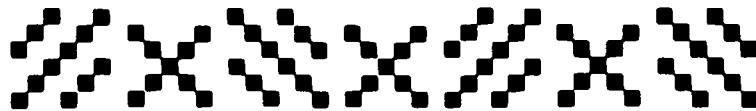


Introduction:  
*Middletown* and Muncie



A half century ago Robert and Helen Lynd presented *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York, 1929). Reviewing it in the *American Mercury*, Henry L. Mencken described the book as "one of the richest and most valuable documents ever concocted by American sociologists."<sup>1</sup> For once Mencken was right. *Middletown* and its sequel, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York, 1937), became classics not only in the field of sociology but in history as well, especially as scholars became more interested in social history. Hardly an American history textbook is published today that does not draw on the Lynds' studies for illustrations and generalizations regarding "typical" family and community life in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Lynds' *Middletown* was, of course, Muncie, Indiana, although, as Richard Jensen's essay in this issue suggests, Muncie may not have been the wisest choice of a typical American community. Some of Muncie's citizens agreed, or at least preferred that the Lynds had settled elsewhere. These social scientists, they suggested, did not fully understand the real Muncie,<sup>2</sup> a criticism partly supported by Carrollyle M. Frank's essay below. But whether the Lynds were right or wrong in their questions, themes, or interpretations, their two *Middletown* books provide later generations with the fullest and most thought provoking studies of an Indiana community in the twentieth century. And the work of understanding Muncie goes on, as the essay by Theodore Caplow exemplifies. The

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<sup>1</sup> H. L. Mencken, "A City in Moronia," *American Mercury*, XVI (Marc. 1929), 379.

<sup>2</sup> For reaction to the Lynds' work among Muncie residents see Heath Bowman, *Hoosier* (Indianapolis, 1941), 275-76; and C. Walter McCarty, ed., *Indiana Today* (n.p., 1942), 46-47.



ROBERT S. LYND  
AND



HELEN MERRILL LYND  
Ca. 1930

Photos courtesy of Helen Merrill Lynd.

contents of this issue of the *Indiana Magazine of History* are indicative of the many and varied ways of studying both the past and present of one of Indiana's most widely known cities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The editors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dwight W. Hoover in planning this issue.