

Teaching Indiana History

A Roundtable

Each December, the Indiana Historical Society holds its annual Founders Day award ceremony. Watching this winter's proceedings, we noticed—as we do every year—the range and intensity of historical activity, across the state, represented at the event. Amateur and professional historians from Jasper to Auburn, from Lawrenceburg to Terre Haute, stood up that night to accept recognition for the museum exhibitions, classroom activities, public history projects, and—in some cases—lifetimes of effort that they have devoted to the cause of researching and sharing the state's historical legacy.

The people who do such work—like the people who attend such dinners and the people who read this journal—tend on average to be more seasoned in years than is the general population. The same might be said for historical audiences anywhere—both our desire and our ability to understand the past grow naturally with age. But we also wondered to what extent the particular notion of a distinctive “Indiana history”—still so vital to many older Hoosiers—continues to compel this state's young people beyond their forced exposure to the subject in fourth grade. Wrapped around this question is a larger one: does “Indiana” continue to provide a meaningful marker of common identity at a time when people, jobs, ideas, and images move about with little respect for traditional political boundaries?

A sampling of scholars teaching in the state's colleges and universities suggests that historians, at least, think so. Indiana history, as we confirmed in the weeks following the ceremony, lives on as a topic of study in the university classroom. We asked a few of the historians who teach

such classes to assess the study of Indiana history—how it has changed, how they encourage it in their own classes, how it can continue to represent a meaningful scholarly challenge for the twenty-first-century student. What follows is the transcription of an online discussion carried out from January 12 to February 4, 2011, among four scholars who teach Indiana history in the college classroom. Participating were Bruce Bigelow, Professor of Geography, Butler University; Nicole Etcheson, Alexander M. Bracken Professor of History, Ball State University; Jason Lantzer, Adjunct Professor of History, Butler University and IUPUI; and James H. Madison, Thomas and Kathryn Miller Professor of History, Indiana University Bloomington. The dialogue has been edited for length and clarity.

IMH: I'd like to give everyone an opportunity to describe their Indiana history classes. What do you call your class, how long have you taught it, what are its distinctive features?

Jason Lantzer: My class is officially the "Survey of Indiana History," but I simply call it "Indiana History." I have taught the class, both in the classroom (since 2005) and as a distance learning course (since 1999). Despite the course title, the topic apparently surprised one student recently, who commented on his course evaluation that I was "obviously biased" towards Indiana!

Because it's a survey, I cover the length and breadth of Indiana history—from its pre-history to the present. I tend to focus on politics a good deal, though we also highlight religion, reform, and race. Students tend to enjoy our discussions on the Civil War and the Klan, of course, and I'm going to be adding a new lecture on eugenics this semester.

James H. Madison: Like Jason, I teach a course whose official title is "Survey of Indiana History," and I too call it "Indiana History." I first taught the class in 1977. What I consider distinctive is how much the class has changed over the years—as I learned more, as students changed, as the relationship between past and present has changed. Recently, I've tried especially to do more with the last fifty years and to connect the recent past with earlier pasts.

Nicole Etcheson: At Ball State, the course is called "History of Indiana." I started teaching it in 2006. Although I had completed my PhD on a midwestern history topic at Indiana University under Jim Madison, my

jobs had been outside the state until six years ago. Hence, I didn't have the opportunity to teach Indiana history until recently. Like Jason, I cover a period from pre-history to fairly close to the present. I try for a balance of political and social history. Probably the course's most distinctive feature is that our readings consist of primary sources and novels rather than historical monographs. After each novel, the students write a "What Is a Hoosier?" paper. The purpose of these short papers is to get them to think about state and regional identity.

Bruce Bigelow: I have taught "Indiana and the Midwest" three times. I concentrate on Indiana, but I also discuss regional history. The course begins with Native Americans, but I concentrate on the Civil War, industrialization, the Klan, and race. I use fiction, especially novels, in the class as well as historical case studies. I do a module on Chicago because it is the regional capital and Butler University has a large cohort of suburban Chicago students.

IMH: One hundred years ago, writers like George Cottman seemed almost desperately concerned to rescue old documents, capture pioneer memories, and generally to instill Hoosiers with a pride in the history of this state. The fact that you all teach your Indiana history classes makes me feel that you believe there is still a uniquely "Indiana" history worth knowing—and perhaps still a uniquely Hoosier identity that grows from that history.

In this global age, do state boundaries still make sense—either as meaningful markers of historical content or as defining boundaries of a common set of continuing cultural and social traits? And if so, what do you want your students to consider as the essence of the Indiana experience?

NE: Having lived in Texas for almost a decade, I don't think Indiana has as profound a sense of state identity. Maybe no one can match the Texans for that. But I do think it's possible to identify elements of a Hoosier, and a broader midwestern, identity.

In the class, however, I want the students to come to an idea of the "essence of the Indiana experience" for themselves. There are themes that I emphasize as important in Indiana history: the southernness of the state's settlers; the conservative nature of the state's politics, not just recently but throughout Indiana's history; and Hoosiers' troubling history of race relations—from William Henry Harrison's efforts to force slav-

ery into the territory up through the period of the Ku Klux Klan and beyond.

But the “What Is a Hoosier?” exercises allow students to bring together the novels, primary sources, and lecture materials to posit their own thesis about what Indiana’s essence might be. At the beginning of the semester, the students’ gut reaction is mostly that a Hoosier is a Colts fan. I tell them that I can remember when the Colts moved here from Baltimore, and someone interviewed on television said he wished Indianapolis had at least stolen a good team. My point is that certain parts of what they consider important to the state are relatively recent in historical terms—perhaps even ephemeral. Some of the students will, in their papers, discuss parochialism and racism as Hoosier traits; others will emphasize self-reliance, industry, family, and community. Most importantly, I hope to get them thinking about Hoosier identity and what it might be.

BB: As a historical cultural geographer, I am very much concerned about the issue of culture regions and their unique identity. I do think that Indiana is in a distinct region—namely, the Lower Midwest. The area would include central and southern Ohio and Illinois as well as Indiana. The area is a mixture of Border Southerners and Midlanders from Pennsylvania, as well as later immigrants from Europe and blacks from the South. It is an area that is conservative Protestant with a Roman Catholic minority, and is politically conservative, whether Republican or Democratic. Within the Lower Midwest, Indiana can be defined as a sub-region. I believe that Americans still identify with their state because their knowledge is circumscribed to a degree by state borders; they also identify with one of their major state universities, both as the home to their favorite sports teams and as a place to attend in favor of a university in a neighboring state.

I am not sure that the essence of the Hoosier experience would be very different from that of similar portions of Ohio and Illinois, except that those states have major northern cities which are very different from their “downstates.” Indiana has no Cleveland or Chicago to compromise its Southernness. In my course, which includes the Midwest generally as well as Indiana, students have read novels by Edward Eggleston (*The Hoosier Schoolmaster*), Booth Tarkington (*The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Alice Adams*), and Dan Wakefield (*Going All the Way*), essays by Meredith Nicholson, poems by James Whitcomb Riley, *Middletown* by the Lynds, and James Madison’s account of the horror of the 1930 lynch-

ing in Marion (*A Lynching in the Heartland*). From these readings, my students probably gather that the essence of Indiana history is rural and small-city living, socioeconomic class division, the automobile industry, anti-black racism, and conservative religion and politics. On the other hand, there are obviously people and places in the state that challenge these assumptions; Indiana is contested space in which glib generalizations can be countered by antithetical examples.

In conclusion, I believe there is a distinct Hoosier identity for those who grow up in Indiana (though not for recent in-migrants), with the exception of the northwestern portion of the state (The Region), which is more a part of Chicagoland. However, it is difficult to talk about an essential “Indiana” experience that is unique from the rest of the lower Midwest, at least, and possibly a larger part of America.

JL: Let me try to answer this question in two ways that are far from mutually exclusive. The first is as a native-born Hoosier. I can honestly say that I’ve always felt a specific Hoosier identity. Perhaps this comes from having relatives (and traveling to see them often) in Kentucky. That is to say, I always had a sense of being “from” a specific place (Indiana) and “not from” another, despite familial ties. That sense of Hoosier identity was perhaps reinforced by being from northern Indiana (Elkhart County), as well. We were not part of The Region, nor part of either the Fort Wayne or Indianapolis metro regions. South Bend (save for Notre Dame football) held little allure. Nor, despite constant news broadcasts were we really part of Michiana (southwestern lower Michigan/northern Indiana) either. We were Hoosiers, and the northern state boundary for us was just as important as the southern one in defining who I was in terms of my state affiliation.

Now, one could argue that this is more about defining yourself by who you are *not* than it is by who you *are*, but I’d say that my experience never cast those other areas in a negative light per se. Rather, I felt that there was never anything wrong with being from where I was from—no reason to look down upon it, surely—and many reasons to be proud of what was and what could be.

Having had the opportunity to live in the three classic regions of the state, I think the old south, central, and north distinctions still hold a good deal of weight. But I also think—and here comes the more professional, academic side of my answer—that Hoosiers (whether native-born or of more recent vintage) don’t often know enough of their own past (good or bad) to take pride in either the real accomplishments or in

the progress that has been made in issues like race. I've encountered native Hoosiers (in both Indiana History and U.S. History surveys) who are shocked to learn of Indiana's Golden Age (in both politics and in literature), and who are more apt to assume an almost "flyover" attitude towards their home state— if it didn't or doesn't happen on the coasts, then it must not have mattered. But I've also found that if you spend some time linking Indiana's story to wider (whether regional or national) stories (putting things in a Hoosier context), those same students also come around a bit to thinking that maybe Indiana isn't such a bad place either to be from or to live in.

So, in conclusion, yes, I think there is a Hoosier identity. Is it as distinct as Nicole's experience in Texas? Probably not! But it is there, if somewhat below the surface, and for all our midwestern commonalities, it is also different from what one sees in residents of our neighboring states—just as Indiana's experiences have been different. On the other hand, I might argue some days that we aren't exactly unique. At these times, I'm inclined to think instead that Hoosiers offer a rather good reflection of the nation as a whole—warts and all.

JHM: This is getting serious! The answer is "mostly yes": there is a place called Indiana and a people who call themselves Hoosiers. In class I use the old notion of an imagined community—the ability of so many people who have never met face-to-face to feel nonetheless some connections, and at times to act on those connections.

To understand this particular imagined community it's very important that my students understand the migration and cultural patterns of the pioneer era, the distinctive mix of Upland South pioneers with mid-Atlantic and New England newcomers. I still think that themes raised by earlier scholars such as Richard Power and James Bergquist—and revised more recently by Nicole, Bruce, and others—are foundational and remain significant in the twenty-first century. Somehow in all that mixing there developed a distinctive Indiana, different from Texas (thank goodness!) and even from Ohio, Michigan, or Kentucky.

Of course whatever we think might be Hoosier identity is challenged by alternatives and contradictions. I spend a lot of time in class on "the others"—cases of people and ideas outside the mainstream, including Rappites, abolitionists, and rebels like Eugene Debs. Surprisingly, basketball is another great subject with which to challenge the mainstream and to goad students into thinking. I always proclaim that Oscar Robertson is the greatest Hoosier player ever. And then we

think about the Crispus Attucks High School team. Last semester I assigned an essay that challenged the Milan miracle.

I also work to help students see the changing and contested purpose of state and township government, from 1816 forward. Here, too, there is an Indiana identity, too often taken for granted. Richard Longworth is on a crusade to diminish the midwestern states as governmental units by substituting extensive regional organizations and partnerships. It's a quixotic idea because Hoosiers will never give up state control—even in response to relatively uncontroversial proposals such as a regional, multi-state tourist organization.

I hope to teach Indiana history in a way that respects the state and its culture and also challenges it. I want students to consider the possibility that some of the central—even celebrated—Hoosier traits may be outdated. I hope they will question the sense of complacency that produces such Hoosier wisdom that “if it ain't broke don't fix it,” or that “good enough is good enough.” So, I pay more attention to the last half-century and to the challenges of education, to the methamphetamine crisis, to the withering of small towns, to the passing of high-paying and secure jobs in auto plants. Of course, reading Tarkington's *Magnificent Ambersons*, which I often assign, helps us understand that change is nothing new in Indiana, even if it has been more evolutionary than revolutionary (a concept my students have abundant opportunities to consider).

This imagined community of Hoosiers may not be as strong now as it was a hundred years ago. It's interesting, however, that organizers of the 1916 state centennial were also anxious about Indiana's identity in their rapidly changing age. Our next big challenge is preparing for the 2016 bicentennial. Among the outcomes of that celebration, I hope, will be new ways to think about and to teach Indiana history, from the fourth grade to colleges.

IMH: I'd like to pick up on Jim's challenge that we consider “new ways to think about and to teach Indiana history.” You propose this goal, Jim, as an outcome of the 2016 bicentennial observance, so I hope you will all forgive me if I pop the cork a bit early and put you on the spot right now. We can call it our celebration of the 195th anniversary of statehood.

Specifically: What needs to happen next—whether in fourth grade, high school, or the college classroom? What ideas, questions, voices, skills do we need to add to the mix to ensure that Indiana History class-

es not only remain in our schools and universities, but actually become the site of some of our most interesting and daring teaching and learning experiences? Put differently, if you had all the resources and all the energy you needed, what would the Indiana History curriculum of the future look like?

NE: For guidance on the future of Indiana history, I turned to my colleagues Ronald V. Morris and Dorshell Stewart. Ron and Dorshell are the elementary social studies education experts in Ball State's history department. Ron has published extensively on teaching elementary students (most recently in 2010, *The Field Trip Book: Study Travel Experiences in Society Studies*) and Dorshell taught fourth grade in Gary before entering academia.

I'll start with Ron's quip that it would be nice if we taught Indiana history in fourth grade. He joked that the students might get "fifteen minutes on Friday afternoon after the fire drill." Because it's not emphasized on the ISTEP test that students take in fifth grade, and because the teachers are tasked to cover so much material they know will be tested, Indiana history coverage is skimpy. When I was growing up in Indiana, we took Indiana History in seventh grade, but Ron tells me this is no longer the case. (All I remember learning about is Tecumseh.) So he would like to see the subject revisited in junior high or high school, where students are capable of thinking about the issues in more sophisticated ways than they can in fourth grade. Elementary students may not be ready to discuss controversies in Indiana history. At one workshop, a teacher asked about how to deal with the 1920s Klan with her students.

Dorshell emphasized—and Ron affirmed—that as teachers, they felt constrained by the limitations of material. They both felt there were limited sources—secondary and primary—available to teach young students. With dwindling budgets, field trips are disappearing. Dorshell remarked that she would do more with online field trips that allow students to access historical sites on the Internet. Ron talked about having students work backward—and I might try this in my college course. They have accessible sources in Indiana history: parents, grandparents, neighbors. Start with oral histories of the recent past and then work towards the earlier eras.

Part of the reason I like Ron's idea is that I'm increasingly uncomfortable with Indiana history's fascination with the pioneer period. Let me say that I love log cabins—like Daniel Webster, I was not born in one, but I've made many a pilgrimage to them. But I find my college stu-

dents too glibly saying that Hoosiers are hardy pioneer types, eliding a full century of different migratory streams, industrialization, and myriad social and political controversies that have marked Indiana's past. The pioneer past is also exclusionary: if the Hoosier is a descendant of these pioneers, can Hispanics, Asian immigrants, my Polish American nephews, or African Americans be "real" Hoosiers? Perhaps if the college students began my "What Is a Hoosier?" exercise with their grandparents, they would produce a broader, more contemporary, more accurate picture of Hoosiers and their history

BB: I will let others talk about elementary and secondary teaching of Indiana history. With regard to the future of teaching state history in college, I will discuss ideas, questions, and voices. (I confess to thinking aloud about these topics with George Geib of Butler University and Randy Mills of Oakland City University before responding to the questions.)

In terms of ideas, I'd like to see more discussion of Indiana during the past thirty years, an era of heightened globalization. Students could consider deindustrialization and the drastic weakening of the automobile industry. Take a stroll through downtown Anderson—it looks like a bomb hit the area. Downtown Kokomo and Marion also look "shaggy." We need case studies (articles or books) of the change that has occurred in places like these. On the other hand, we should study the success stories of growth poles like Bloomington, West Lafayette, and Carmel to give a balanced account of globalization in Indiana. Another aspect of globalization would be a study of the large Latino migration to Indiana in the past 30 years.

With regard to questions, I consider one of the most important to be the degree to which a Hoosier identity means anything these days. Certainly, a state identity based on the pioneers and local color nineteenth-century writers seems far removed today. On the other hand, it is maintained by the professional and collegiate sports teams, especially for basketball. Histories of the programs at IU, Purdue, and Butler could be included as a module in a college course. Another option for resuscitating state identity would be to have students recover more of the "sacred texts" of Hoosier identity. As I mentioned earlier, I have used early Indiana literature in my course, with great success.

As to voices, I think, first, we should emphasize more minority voices—racial and religious. I have in mind Tecumseh and the Prophet; Wes Montgomery, Oscar Robertson, and Darryl Pinckney; and Theodore

Hesburgh. Second, students should also hear more of the voices of significant politicians: from Oliver Morton, Eugene Debs, and Albert Beveridge to Richard Hatcher, William Hudnut, and Richard Lugar.

I am arguing for two things here: an extension of the course forward by studying in more depth the changes in Indiana in the past 30 years, but also the act of recovery for those who have forgotten the major writers, politicians, and other important Hoosiers of the more distant past.

JHM: Nicole is right about the necessity of expanding our teaching of Indiana history beyond the fourth grade. I doubt circumstances will allow us to introduce new history classes into a hard-pressed curriculum and an environment of narrow, standardized testing. Some teachers are able to incorporate more Indiana subject matter into general U.S. history classes at the middle and high school levels. Instead of teaching the Erie Canal, we can teach the Wabash and Erie Canal; instead of Boston's Sacco and Vanzetti case we can teach our own Ku Klux Klan. There are also local history subjects in every community that can connect to state and national standards.

I think there are two primary means for bringing more and better Indiana history to classrooms at all levels. First, remember that all teaching begins with the teacher; we need more teachers to be better prepared and enthusiastic to teach Indiana subject matter. Among the best ways to do that, I think, is through summer workshops that focus on content. Workshops would include reading and discussing lots of primary sources, as well as the best of secondary sources, such as essays from the *Indiana Magazine of History*. They would include hands-on exploration of the varieties of subject matter, method, sources, and delivery to be found in historical study.

The second step would be to strengthen, enlarge, and make more accessible the content itself. The *IMH* has made good progress. So have the Indiana Historical Society, the Indiana Supreme Court, and numerous other institutions. But the busy classroom teacher struggles to make sense of all the opportunities and to bring them into the classroom. Coordination of what is now online would help greatly. So would adding new digital materials. Many teachers would welcome sophisticated and thoughtful units on the best subject matter that connect to core U.S. history issues and bring the range of primary sources to the classroom.

Finally, Nicole and Bruce are right about the challenges of pioneer domination. The state's history needs a foundation, and I think that's to

be found in the pioneer era. We need to improve our understanding of the varieties of pioneers, as for example, teaching about the pioneer black communities like Lyles Station and Roberts Settlement. But the changes since 1850 are just as important. So are changes since 1950. Bruce's call for a more globalized Indiana history is critical. I've recently been working on the last hundred years of the auto industry in the state. In that one subject, among several others, can be found superb connections between past and present and core issues in Indiana, U.S., and world history.

JL: Ah, so many good ideas! While it has been awhile since my own fourth-grade Indiana History experience (though I have nothing but good memories of the "yellow book," the unit flash cards, and the various projects — including making a spear out of my mother's new broom, which didn't go over very well!), let me echo what others have said. It would indeed be nice if there was more coverage later on — if, in short, instruction in Indiana history was built up from elementary to middle to high school. Whether those later classes would be more "unit" based, or just available as potential social studies offerings (especially at the high school level), I'm not sure. The obvious first step would be to at least force a conversation at the State House as to why Indiana History isn't included as part of ISTEP — and not rest until a real answer is given or real change takes place.

The other requirement for moving forward in our teaching (at all levels) is obviously to make more material available and to let more people know about it. I'm referring not just to teachers, but to the community at large, including the growing home-school community. Short of achieving an ISTEP revolution, perhaps the surest way to reach Hoosiers about the importance of their history is to convince school boards that it matters.

As for how to teach (at the college level) in the future, I don't fret the pioneer domination. It is a hook to draw students in. One of the things I do try, while following the usual chronological path, is to move both forward and back in time. Talking about Native Americans, for example, opens ourselves up to discussing why Hoosiers have opted to name so many things after the tribes they displaced, why schools and sports teams (from the Indianapolis Indians to school teams) are named after them—even why we've moved away from doing so recently. No matter how you teach it, helping students to make connections between the past and their present is the important

thing. In short, I'm not worried about the future of Indiana History. I'm as excited about it as I am about the past that I try to convey to my students whenever I get the chance.

