

**THOMAS HART BENTON'S INDIANA MURALS
IN HISTORY AND MEMORY**

A Thesis
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF ARTS

by
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July 2016

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hart Benton was commissioned to paint murals depicting Indiana history for the Indiana state pavilion at the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. The completed Indiana murals were twelve feet high and over two hundred feet long, wrapping around the entire exhibition hall. Visitors to the Indiana pavilion experienced Indiana's history through a continuous stream of narrative imitating the flow of time. After several years of storage following the fair, the panels were given to Indiana University in Bloomington in 1938, where they currently reside. While most scholarship has focused on the original message and context of the Indiana murals, the murals' nearly seventy-five year display at IU necessitates a more thorough analysis of the murals at the university, with specific attention to the contextual changes since the time of the fair.

The relocation of the murals to IU and the resultant restructuring of their historical narrative have altered perceptions of their imagery and attributed new meanings to the historical scenes Benton depicted. The aim of this study is to better understand the complex nature of Benton's Indiana murals by exploring the ways in which changes in context result in alteration of the original message and the viewers' reception of the murals. My research explores the murals' role in university politics, reactions to the murals by their university audience, and recent controversies. A study of the Indiana murals in terms of the fluidity of historical construction and the effects of collective memory on their reception is significant because it leads to a greater understanding of the present's cultural ideals, and begins to explain why the murals continue to elicit such strong reactions from viewers—whether to protest against their presence at the university or promote their preservation for the benefit of future generations.

For Jacob.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Dr. Gerald Silk, for his guidance and advice throughout the process, and for his great patience. I also owe thanks to Dr. Adele Nelson, who generously provided many valuable suggestions, and to Dr. Susanna Gold, for her encouragement in the early writing stages. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with the members of the graduate Art History department at Temple University, both faculty and peers, who supported my development as an art historian throughout my time at Temple. I would also like to thank Dr. William Scarpaci, who first encouraged my passion for art.

I could not have completed this project without the love and support of my friends and family. To my parents, who responded thoughtfully to my frequent inquiries about their memories of Indiana, to my grandmother for her prayers, to every member of the extended Gibson family, to William for asking if he could read it when it's done, and to my loving husband who has been with me every step of the way—thank you all.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1932 Thomas Hart Benton was commissioned to paint a mural depicting Indiana History for the Indiana state pavilion at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago as the state's principal contribution to the fair. Benton's completed cycle was twelve feet high and over two hundred feet long, wrapping around the entire exhibition hall. There were two threads to the story: industry and culture. These two cycles started at the entrance and made their way around the room in opposite directions, coming together again at the exit. The Indiana murals depicted the history of the state featuring the daily lives of "average" people, from the activities of the prehistoric mound builders to city life of the 1930s.¹ As they walked through the room, visitors to the Indiana pavilion experienced this history through a continuous stream of narrative imitating the flow of time.

Benton did not sugarcoat the state's history, and a number of visitors found parts of the murals offensive, including a scene with the Ku Klux Klan engaged in a cross-burning, a mineworker throwing a rock at a soldier during a strike in the Terre Haute mining field, and an unattractive barefoot pioneer woman. But the majority of visitors responded positively to Benton's extensive knowledge of Indiana history and his heroic

¹ According to Kathleen Foster in *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, Benton's murals had no formal title. During the fair, the work was generally called the "Indiana Mural" or "Indiana's Mural." Individual panels are known by the names in David Laurance Chambers' guidebook to the murals. It is not known whether Benton was involved with these titles. After the murals were installed at Indiana University, they were also called the "Social History of Indiana," perhaps because of Benton's 1936 mural, *A Social History of the State of Missouri*. Kathleen A. Foster, "Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals," in Kathleen A. Foster, Nanette Esbeck Brewer, and Margaret Contompasis, *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Art Museum in association with Indiana University Press, 2000), 29.

depiction of the hard working people who made the state. The murals were put into storage after the fair, but their history was far from over. In 1938 the panels were given to Indiana University in Bloomington, where they found a permanent home. Sixteen panels were installed in the new Indiana University Auditorium, two in Woodburn Hall, and four in the University Theatre.

The relocation of Benton's panels to Indiana University and changes to their sequencing and display can be considered as a restructuring of a historical narrative. Benton recognized the importance of memory in reconstructing historical events and their significance in the minds of Americans. In his autobiography, *An American in Art*, Benton said that his mural, *A Social History of the State of Missouri*, commissioned in 1935 for the Missouri State Capitol, was like his Indiana mural in that it "would deal with a life which was in my experience—memory experience, if not immediate."² In this statement he acknowledged the role of memory in the construction of his narrative. Past events are selected and interpreted through the process of memory. Such interpretations of history are dependent on present values, and certain events are deemed important enough to be included in the narrative. In this way, history is undergoing constant reorganizations and reinterpretations.

Remembering is an individual act, but it also constitutes a social experience, in which memory is shared/communicated in various forms by various groups and institutions.³ Collective memory, a shared interpretation of historical events, is key in

² Thomas Hart Benton, *An American in Art: A Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 44.

³ Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), Kindle Edition location 137.

determining which events are commemorated and how they are commemorated.⁴

Collective memory of historical events in a society changes over time, and present circumstances affect people's understanding of their history. The visual history represented in Benton's Indiana panels is now far removed from its original circumstances, not only in time, but also in location, arrangement, and social context.

Reception of the murals by groups and individuals throughout their history is essential to this paper, since the circumstances of viewers' interaction is key to understanding the controversies they engendered. In this paper I investigate the role of collective memory and the fluidity of historical constructions in understanding the murals in their current situation. Portraits of certain public figures that would have been recognized in the 1930s are unfamiliar to later audiences. Images of locomotives, symbolic of the great technological advancements of modern life when the murals were painted, no longer evoke the same sense of awe in contemporary viewers, as these images of the "present" have become images of the past. The scene of the Ku Klux Klan rally has continued to stir controversy at Indiana University as it did at the fair, but the recent and highly critical reception of the murals in the 2000s is informed by new historical memories of the civil rights-era Klan and events far postdating the Chicago exposition. By considering the murals throughout their history, from Benton's original concept and intent to their current home at Indiana University, I explain how new meanings have been attached to the murals as perceptions of their imagery shift with changing ideas about Indiana history and the role of public art.

⁴ John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13.

Previous scholarship on Benton's Indiana Mural has focused on its original presentation, goals, and message as exhibited during the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, and on the mural's place in Benton's body of work as part of his artistic development/career. Henry Adams's biography, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original*, describes the commission and Benton's process, providing an overview of the content, and visitor reactions.⁵ Matthew Baigell discusses the Indiana murals along with Benton's *America Today* (1931) and *The Arts of Life in America* (1932) in terms of the artist's developments as an American muralist, calling the three murals, "major documents of American Scene Painting."⁶ In a catalog published by the Indiana University Art Museum entitled *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, Kathleen A. Foster, Nanette Esseck Brewer, and Margaret Contompasis, offer a thorough study of the Indiana murals from an art historical perspective.⁷ The essays in the catalog examine Benton's original concept and process, the murals as visual history, and their restoration. One of the most recent publications on the Indiana murals appeared in the June 2009 issue of the *Indiana Magazine of History*, *Thomas Hart Benton's Murals at 75*, which contains a collection of essays from scholars who presented at a public symposium

⁵ Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 192-207.

⁶ Mathew Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), 130.

⁷ Kathleen A. Foster, Nanette Esseck Brewer, and Margaret Contompasis, *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Art Museum in association with Indiana University Press, 2000).

held at Indiana University in celebration of the murals' seventy-fifth anniversary.⁸ Even though the murals have been installed at Indiana University for the majority of their existence, previous scholarship does not provide an analysis of the murals at their second location, despite the significance of this change in venue. Discussions of the murals that give attention to their location at Indiana University are limited to the subject of their restoration and conservation.

The arrival of the murals at Indiana University is not the end of their story, and the murals continue to have a powerful effect on viewers. This paper focuses on the murals after the fair, in their location at Indiana University, and the previous scholarship on Benton's original concept for the murals and their role at the Century of Progress Exposition will serve as a basis for this study. I consider the reception history of the mural, and I attempt to understand the murals as they are currently displayed. My research explores the murals' role in university politics, reactions to the murals by their university audience, and recent controversies, such as the protest by the Black Student Union.⁹

The thesis is divided into three sections. The first chapter considers the commission of the murals and their role in constructing a history of Indiana that could be used as a tool to educate the public about the importance of common people as makers of

⁸ "Thomas Hart Benton's Murals at 75," special issue, *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (2009).

⁹ Black life on college campuses is now a contentious subject, and it has given rise to frequent student protests. Following the 2014 shooting of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown by a police officer, the resulting Black Lives Matter movement elicited intense debate concerning race and diversity on college campuses. Notably, student protests at the University of Missouri in 2015 resulted in the resignation of the university's chancellor and the Missouri University System president.

history. I look at Benton's ideas on history painting, and how his visual history of Indiana's cultural and industrial progress corresponded to the goal of the Century of Progress Exposition to open the viewer's mind to positive applications of technology as a way to launch the American population and economy out of the depths of the Depression. This section will be the foundation for a discussion of the significance of the change in the murals' context by providing a solid scholarly background from which to approach these changes.

The second chapter focuses on the murals after the fair, Indiana University's acquisition of the murals, and the installation on campus. I explore the relationships between the individual panels and their imagery within their new location. This chapter considers how the relocation and separation of the panels, and their new orientation in relationship to one another results in the breaking down of their original message and fundamentally changes the way they interact with viewers. I also explore the effects of the viewers' temporal distance from the events depicted in the mural, revealing the dialogue between past and present carried out in the spaces occupied by Benton's panels.

The final chapter considers the viewer relationship to the murals in a case study on the controversy during the 1990s and early 2000s surrounding the panel "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, and the Press," in Woodburn Hall. I look into the history and activities of the Klan in Indiana and the continuing presence of the Klan in memory. I also consider the motivations behind protests against the panel, the University's response, and events that aggravated the controversy.

The aim of this study is to better understand the complex nature of Benton's Indiana murals by exploring the ways in which changes in context result in alteration of

the original message and the viewers' reception of the murals. As American culture scholar George Lipsitz points out, "What we choose to remember about the past, where we begin and end our retrospective accounts, and who we include and exclude from them—these do a lot to determine how we live and what decisions we make in the present."¹⁰ A study of the Indiana murals in terms of the fluidity of historical construction and the effects of collective memory on their reception is significant because it leads to a greater understanding of the present's cultural ideals, and begins to explain why the murals continue to elicit such strong reactions from viewers—whether to protest against their presence at the university or promote their preservation for the benefit of future generations.

¹⁰ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 34.

CHAPTER 1

THE INDIANA MURALS AT THE FAIR, 1933

In historian David Glassberg's book, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*, Glassberg suggests that in order to understand public reception of history, historians can look at "public historical representations not only as created by their authors but also as reshaped by the institutional bureaucracies that present them and reinterpreted by the various groups that see and hear them." He further explains, "historians can investigate the successive contexts created by the authors, by the mass media, and by the public, tracing the path through each particular place where knowledge about the past is communicated."¹¹ Incorporating Glassberg's approach to history, this paper investigates the ways in which the history depicted in the Indiana murals has been reshaped by their move to Indiana University, the university's contextualization and arrangement of the panels, and viewers' interpretations of the murals. This first chapter begins with a look at the past to examine the role and perception of Thomas Hart Benton's Indiana murals—sometimes referred to as *A Social History of the State of Indiana*—in their original display for the public in the Indiana pavilion at the 1933 Century of Progress exposition, a world's fair commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Chicago. This examination of the contexts created by Benton, as well as by the media and the public, will provide a starting point from which

¹¹ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 17.

the chapters that follow explore the impact of the subsequent contextual shifts of reactions to the mural and attitudes toward its future.

When Benton received the Indiana mural commission, he was already well known for his *America Today* (1931) mural in the New School for Social Research, and *The Arts of Life in America* (1932) in the Whitney Museum of American Art (figs. 1-2).¹²

Although Benton gained national recognition for these murals' depiction of people engaged in the activities of modern life, when Benton first moved to New York in 1912 after two years study in Paris, he was devoted to modernist abstraction. Much of his work reflected his interest in "Synchromism," a movement that sought to achieve a harmonious composition of color and rhythmic forms (fig. 3).¹³ In 1916, Benton showed his work in the Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters along with prominent New York modernists headed by Alfred Stieglitz. Adams notes that in doing so, Benton "allied himself with those who opposed literary subject matter in art."¹⁴ Although Benton was never part of Stieglitz's inner circle, and eventually became a prime opponent of the New York modernists, he did share their interest in creating an authentic national art.¹⁵

Between 1918 and 1919 Benton served in the U.S. Navy during World War I as an architectural draughtsman, and he returned to New York with a renewed interest in

¹² *America Today* is no longer located at the New School. AXA Equitable Life Insurance Company purchased the mural in 1984 and displayed it at the company's headquarters in New York City. In 2012 AXA donated the mural to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, its present location.

¹³ Adams, *American Original*, 70.

¹⁴ Adams, *American Original*, 77.

¹⁵ Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 39.

subject matter.¹⁶ Benton explained his shift from abstraction to realism, “I found my painting sterile, and I parted company with the so-called modern movement.”¹⁷ Benton became interested in expressing the subject of American life in his art, and he was drawn to mural painting for its ability to reach a larger audience.¹⁸ When Benton received his first mural commission in 1930 for the New School of Social Research, views on mural painting in the United States had been changing. Once seen as “architectural decoration,” in the late 1920s mural painting started to gain support as a unique class of American art distinguished for its utility in communicating to the public.¹⁹ Artists and critics were embracing “The American Wave,” a term coined in 1931 to characterize the pursuit of a distinctly American art that could express “the spirit of the land” without relying on European models.²⁰

Around the same time, the Mexican mural movement had caught the attention of artists and critics in the United States. Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros spent a significant amount of time working in the United States in the

¹⁶ Benton, *An American in Art*, 43-44.

¹⁷ Ruth Pickering, excerpt from “Thomas Hart Benton on His Way Back to Missouri,” in *A Thomas Hart Benton Miscellany: Selections from His Published Opinions, 1916-1960*, ed. Matthew Baigell (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1971), 76. Originally published in *Arts and Decoration*, XLII, (February, 1935), 19-20.

¹⁸ Pickering, “Back to Missouri,” 76.

¹⁹ Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 111.

²⁰ Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 88-90.

1920s and 1930s.²¹ Benton developed a relationship with Orozco in New York in the late 1920s, when both showed their work at Alma Reed's gallery. The artists were commissioned to paint murals for the New School at the same time, resulting in Benton's *America Today* and Orozco's *Revolution and Universal Brotherhood* (1931), and they remained on good terms after the gallery closed.²² Benton was likely aware of Orozco's *Epic of American Civilization* mural cycle (1932-1934) for Dartmouth College (fig. 4) as he was painting the Indiana murals.²³ Also around the time Benton worked on the Indiana murals, Rivera painted his *Detroit Industry* murals (1933) at the Detroit Institute of Arts and the controversial *Man at the Crossroads* at the Rockefeller Center in New York (1933). Benton would have been familiar with Rivera's work before the artist's visits to the United States in the 1930s, as images of Rivera's murals in Mexico were widely circulated in the United States and were frequently discussed in art publications.²⁴ It is likely that Benton's murals were informed by Rivera's retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1931, which included eight "portable fresco" panels (fig. 5).²⁵ In *Muralism Without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940*, Anna Indych-López explains that artists in Mexico and the United

²¹ Anna Indych-López, *Muralism Without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 1-3.

²² Adams, *American Original*, 156-157.

²³ Nanette Esseck Brewer, "Benton as Hoosier Historian: Constructing a Visual Narrative in the Indiana Murals," in *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 141.

²⁴ Indych-López, *Muralism Without Walls*, 4-5, 131.

²⁵ Indych-López, *Muralism Without Walls*, 129.

States had a common interest in turning away from European models, and “Mexican artists such as Orozco and Rivera not only provided a nationalist model for an emerging American cultural renaissance but their artistic production in the United States also legitimized American artists’ own search for identity as part of a hemispheric initiative.”²⁶ In his autobiography, Benton stated that the Mexican muralist’s “concern with publicly significant meanings and with the pageant of Mexican national life corresponded perfectly with what I had in mind for the United States.”²⁷

Benton’s *America Today* and *The Arts of Life in America* impressed viewers with their bold portrayal of the contemporary American experience. During the 1920s and 1930s, “American scene” painting referred to the naturalistic rendering of scenes of American life “with specifically American connotations.”²⁸ By the mid-1930s, the main groups recognized within American scene painting were Regionalism, characterized as a rural and conservative movement, and Social Realism, known as an urban and socially critical movement.²⁹ Although a number of Benton’s works depicted American city life and industry, often with references to socialist concerns, (including all three of his murals of the 1930s), Benton’s name became attached to Regionalism as one of the Regionalist “triumvirate” along with Grant Wood and John Steuart Curry.³⁰ While Benton did not

²⁶ Indych-López, *Muralism Without Walls*, 98.

²⁷ Benton, *An American in Art*, 61.

²⁸ Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 83.

²⁹ James M. Dennis, *Renegade Regionalists: The Modern Independence of Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 51.

³⁰ Dennis, *Renegade Regionalists*, 55.

reject this label, he did view it as limiting, and in “American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement” (1951) Benton stated, “The name Regionalism suggested too narrow a range of inspiration to be quite applicable.”³¹

Benton’s association with Regionalism and American scene painting, caused him to be characterized as anti-modern for much of his career, but his complicated connection with modernism has more recently been a subject of exploration. Throughout the 1920s, Benton was regarded as a modernist by his supporters as well as his opponents. His theory of formal organization, which he published in 1926-1927 as a series of articles titled “Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting,” which detailed the principles of abstract composition, remained essential to his compositions throughout his career.³² However, by the 1930s his dedication to the modernist concerns of formal organization was overshadowed by interest in his often-controversial subject matter and his association with Regionalism.³³ In *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*, Wanda Corn considers the dispute between the New York modernists and the Regionalists over the claim to an authentic American art. Corn notes that the Regionalists “rejected the East Coast’s modernist claims to ‘ownership’ of America and its art making,” criticizing them for their supposed imitation of European

³¹ Thomas Hart Benton, “American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement,” in *An American in Art: A Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 148.

³² Adams, *American Original*, 110-114. Thomas Hart Benton, “Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting,” *Arts* 10, no. 5 (November 1926): 285-289; *Arts* 10, no. 6 (December 1926): 340-342; *Arts* 11, no. 1 (January 1927): 43-44; *Arts* 11, no. 2 (February 1927): 95-96; *Arts* 11, no. 3, (March 1927): 145-148.

³³ Adams, *American Original*, 110.

trends and their focus on the art of a single city, New York, as the place of American art production.³⁴ However, in the view of the modernists, the Regionalists were guilty of “co-opting vocabulary, strategies, and stated goals that had been articulated ten to fifteen years earlier by modern artists in New York City.”³⁵ Although as a Regionalist, Benton positioned himself in direct opposition to modernism, several scholars have pointed out the modernist characteristics of his work. In *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism*, Erica Doss argues for Benton as a modernist:

Benton painted *public* murals to fuse the previously separated worlds of ‘high culture’ and ‘the people.’ And he painted them in a *modern* style which completely abandoned [...] the preferred aesthetic model for the Gilded Age. Modern art was powerful, its overlapping forms, rhythmic compositions, and brilliant colors a definitive break from the art of the past. Benton’s public version of modern art emphasized cultural synthesis, not separation. [...] Benton used his art to serve, to enlighten, ‘the people.’³⁶

James Dennis also recognizes the modernist tendencies of the Regionalists in *Renegade Regionalists: The Modern Independence of Grand Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry*, arguing, “Upon close surveillance the battle-worn standard of their tenuous movement diminishes as a stylistic rallying point. Despite their antimodernist rhetoric, they could not escape the inspiration and influence of the assumed enemy, Modernism.”³⁷

³⁴ Corn, *Great American Thing*, 245.

³⁵ Corn, *Great American Thing*, xiv.

³⁶ Erika Lee Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 12.

³⁷ Dennis, *Renegade Regionalists*, 3.

Benton garnered a great deal of attention for his depiction of American life in *America Today* and *The Arts of life in America*, and his style and motifs informed the work of subsequent American muralists.³⁸ Benton's energetic sculptural figures were a dramatic departure from the nineteenth-century mural conventions of flattened forms and muted colors popularized by Puvis de Chavannes (fig. 6).³⁹ Favorable reviews praised Benton's use of vibrant colors and energetic figures as a welcome change in mural painting, while his opponents found them chaotic and overwhelming.⁴⁰ Henry McBride, art critic at the *New York Sun*, condemned *The Arts of Life in America* as "all discord, temporary excitement, roughness, and vulgarity."⁴¹ Benton biographer Polly Burroughs comments that after completing these two murals, "He quickly became the most talked about—and controversial—artist in New York as he surged ahead catapulting himself into the limelight."⁴²

In December of 1932 Richard Lieber, head of commission for Indiana's state pavilion at the Century of Progress Exposition, commissioned Benton to paint a grand mural cycle for the state's exhibition showing Indiana's cultural and industrial

³⁸ Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 111.

³⁹ Adams, *American Original*, 128.

⁴⁰ Adams, *American Original*, 160, 189.

⁴¹ Henry McBride, "Thomas Benton's Murals at the Whitney Museum," in *Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms* ed. Daniel Catton Rich (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, [1975] 1997), 295-296.

⁴² Polly Burroughs, *Thomas Hart Benton: A Portrait* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 104-105.

accomplishments, for the sum of \$7,000.⁴³ The project was to be completed in less than six months, in time for the fair's opening on May 27, 1933. In the period leading up to the fair, Benton's fame continued to grow. He was awarded a Gold Medal by the New York Architectural League shortly before receiving the Indiana commission, and within a few months he received an award for the Whitney Museum of American Art murals from *The Nation* and was recognized in *Vanity Fair's* Hall of Fame for his murals.⁴⁴

Controversy over the Indiana murals began even before Benton started to paint. The announcement of Benton's commission outraged many Indianans, so-called Hoosiers, who were offended by the choice of a non-Hoosier to chronicle the history of their state, especially since it was to be Indiana's main contribution to the fair.⁴⁵ There had been no time for an official competition to select an artist, and Benton was portrayed as an outsider and a "New Yorker" in the media.⁴⁶ Lieber defended the choice of Benton to represent Indiana, praising the artist's skill and hailing him as "a son of the Middle West" and the perfect choice for the work: "Benton, himself, is a product of the Middle West. By tradition and inheritance and by his own development he speaks the language of the mid-westerner. His conception, his treatment and execution are those of a genius."⁴⁷ Lieber emphasized Benton's Midwest heritage, noting that the artist was

⁴³ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 11.

⁴⁴ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 13.

⁴⁵ Adams, *American Original*, 192.

⁴⁶ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 12.

⁴⁷ Richard Lieber, "Foreword" in *Indiana: A Hoosier History; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton*, by David Laurance Chambers (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933), 3.

named after his great-uncle, the famous Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, for whom Benton County and the Benton Township in Indiana were named.⁴⁸ Despite their protest, those who were against Benton's selection were unable to produce a Hoosier muralist capable of the task.⁴⁹ The dispute was eventually addressed with the addition of a smaller gallery to the plans for the Indiana exhibition space, where the works of Indiana artists would be on display—the only state building with an art gallery.⁵⁰ This appeased Indiana artists to some extent; however complaints continued for the duration of the fair, and the amount of space given to Benton compared to Indiana artists remained a point of contention.⁵¹

The Indiana state pavilion was located in a group with the Federal Building, between Lake Michigan and the “North Lagoon” (fig. 7). Unlike in previous world's fairs, the states were not represented by stand-alone buildings, but grouped together in the “Court of States,” a V-shaped structure surrounding a courtyard behind the Federal building (fig. 8). Not only did this arrangement “emphasize the solidarity of our Union,” as the *Official Guide* to the fair proclaimed,⁵² it also saved money and provided easy

⁴⁸ Erika Doss, “Action, Agency, Affect: Thomas Hart Benton's Hoosier History,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (2009), 131.

⁴⁹ Adams, *American Original*, 194.

⁵⁰ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 13.

⁵¹ Adams, *American Original*, 207.

⁵² *Official Guide Book of the Fair: 1933* (Chicago: Century of Progress, 1933), 89.

access to all the state exhibits from one location.⁵³ The courtyard served as a gathering place for ceremonies and special events, including official State Day celebrations.⁵⁴

Benton's murals were located in main hall of Indiana's exposition space. At the end of the space was a smaller reception room featuring works by Indiana artists, through which visitors could exit into a garden with a view of Lake Michigan.⁵⁵ In *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, Kathleen Foster provides a detailed description of the layout of the main exhibition space, based on Lieber's notes for his dedication speech. Thomas Hibben, an architect from Indianapolis, designed the exhibition hall (fig. 9).⁵⁶ The main hall was a 78-by-38-foot rectangular space with a 28-foot ceiling, and it included a separate partition painted with a landscape of the Indiana dunes, which obscured the view into the smaller gallery on the other side.⁵⁷ The floor and walls were black, and the ceiling was blue. Gray-green moldings framed the mural, which was mounted ten feet above floor level.⁵⁸ The murals were accompanied by a guidebook, *Indiana: A Hoosier History; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton*, written by David Laurance Chambers (fig. 10). Portions of the text appeared in panels

⁵³ Lenox R. Lohr, *Fair Management: The Story of A Century of Progress Exposition; A Guide for Future Fairs* (Chicago: Cuneo Press, 1952), 150.

⁵⁴ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 10. Lohr, *Fair Management*, 152.

⁵⁵ *Official Guide Book of the Fair: 1933*, 89.

⁵⁶ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 10.

⁵⁷ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 11. The painting has since been lost.

⁵⁸ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 11.

underneath the murals, captioning the scenes.⁵⁹ Oak benches provided seating in the sparsely furnished hall.⁶⁰ The only other exhibits in the main hall were a large three-dimensional map of Indiana in the middle of the room and a display of documents and literature by Indiana writers.⁶¹

In *Mystic Chords of Memory*, Michael Kammen observes that “societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and that they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present.”⁶² From the start, the Indiana murals were intended to educate the public.⁶³ The construction of the past represented in the murals was tailored to the needs of its Depression-era audience. As was true with many of the exhibits in Century of Progress Exhibition, the Indiana World’s Fair Commission sought to encourage viewers to take a look back at the progress they had made and move into the future with purpose.⁶⁴ As a supporter of the New Deal,⁶⁵ Benton’s personal goals for the murals followed this same line of thought. It was important to Benton that his history murals “had a function beyond that of draping walls,” as he explains in his essay, “A Dream Fulfilled,” written at the

⁵⁹ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 12.

⁶⁰ Virginia Gardner, “Indiana’s Art Stirs Conflict at World Fair: Conservatives Find it Too Modern,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1933.

⁶¹ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 12.

⁶² Michael G. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 3.

⁶³ Brewer, “Hoosier Historian,” 138.

⁶⁴ Joy S. Kasson, “Looking Forward/Looking Backward: Benton’s Indiana Murals and the Chicago World’s Fair,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (2009), 142-143.

⁶⁵ Doss, *Politics of Modernism*, 68.

completion of the Indiana murals.⁶⁶ The design scheme of the murals as they were displayed within in the Indiana pavilion was vital to the fulfillment of their educational purpose and corresponded with the fair's theme of progress.

In "Looking Forward/Looking Backward: Benton's Indiana Murals and the Chicago World's Fair," Joy S. Kasson considers Benton's perspective on history as it corresponds to the concept of a "usable past," a term originally coined in 1918 to "designate a search for a history that would be vigorous and critical and would speak directly to the issues of the present."⁶⁷ Kasson observes that, as well as being essential to the Century of Progress exposition in Chicago, "This same blend of commemoration and futurism characterized many other international expositions around the world."⁶⁸ The Indiana mural commission offered Benton the opportunity to create a dynamic progressive history, an idea he had been considering for years.

American history was a theme Benton initially explored in 1919 with designs for his mural-scale series of paintings, *The American Historical Epic* (fig. 11).⁶⁹ The concept for the series originated during his service in the United States Navy in World War I

⁶⁶ Thomas Hart Benton, "A Dream Fulfilled" in *Indiana: A Hoosier History; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton*, by David Laurance Chambers (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933), 49.

⁶⁷ Kasson, "Looking Forward," 145.

⁶⁸ Kasson, "Looking Forward," 141.

⁶⁹ Benton, "A Dream Fulfilled," 49. Benton exhibited panels from the *American Historical Epic* at the Architectural League in New York over the course of several years. Although he had no experience with wall painting, the *Epic* secured Benton a reputation as a muralist. Benton explains in his autobiography: "I had never painted on any actual walls but the character of my work and perhaps its association with the architectural shows led the critics to treat me as a wall painter." Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, [1937] 1983), 247.

while stationed at the naval base in Norfolk, Virginia. In his autobiography *An American in Art*, Benton explains that until that time his art had followed European patterns, but while in the Navy he began to consider the role of American history in art: “History painting [...] had occupied a large place in the annals of art. Why not look into it again [...] and try to fill the contextual void of my own painting, give it some kind of meaning?”⁷⁰

When he returned from his service in the Navy, Benton began to explore ways of making his art “serviceable for expressing the meanings that [his] experiences in American life were to provide.”⁷¹ Though he abandoned this initial history project in the majority of his work of the 1920s and early 1930s, the grand scale of his plans and idea of a historical epic resurfaced in the Indiana mural. The scenes devoted most of their attention to the daily lives of common people, rather than major historical events and prominent individuals. “History was not a scholarly study for me but a drama. I saw it not as a succession of events but as a continuous flow of action having its climax in my own immediate experience.”⁷² In this project Benton intentionally built on his previous efforts in *The American Historical Epic*. As Benton explains in “A Dream Fulfilled”:

This mural painting of Indiana sees the realization of a project that I have had in mind for fifteen years. In 1919 I set about making a history of the United States which would unroll progressively the social and environmental changes of the country from the savage Indian to the present days of our machine culture. [...] Colonel Lieber’s quick understanding of my desire to represent a social progression made it

⁷⁰ Benton, *An American in Art*, 44.

⁷¹ Benton, *An American in Art*, 50.

⁷² Benton, “A Dream Fulfilled,” 49.

possible for me to transfer my original historical plan from the United States as a whole to the State of Indiana.⁷³

Upon entering the Indiana exhibition hall, visitors found themselves positioned in the middle of Benton's dramatic history, with the story of Indiana's cultural history on one side and its industrial and economic history on the other (fig. 12). "On these walls the story of our state is told," began the large dedication statement positioned above the entryway.⁷⁴ The statement prepared visitors to witness the message of progress proclaimed in Benton's history of the state, explaining, "The future stems from the past. [...] The history of our state will move down the long parade of centuries full of that same fruitfulness of man and earth that makes the story of our past so rich."⁷⁵ The story of industry started with Native Americans and the fur trade, continued on through pioneers, agriculture, advances in transportation, and the expansion of industry (figs. 13-18). The story of Indiana's culture illustrated the mound builders, the arrival of the French, life on the frontier, early communities, the role of women, education, and leisure (figs. 19-24). The murals concluded with the panels *Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought* (fig. 25) and *Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work* (fig. 26), which included two smaller segments, designed so that the panels framed the exit. *Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work*

⁷³ Benton, "A Dream Fulfilled," 49. In "A Hoosier Historian," Brewer notes that the source of the idea for the parallel histories and specific content is not clear—whether it originated with Benton or with Richard Lieber and Thomas Hibben. Whatever the origin of the idea, the mural reflects Benton's personal ideas about art and history. Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 138.

⁷⁴ Thomas Hibben, "Dedication" in *Indiana: A Hoosier History; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton*, by David Laurance Chambers (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933).

⁷⁵ Hibben, "Dedication."

shows Indiana's booming limestone industry, while in the background anxious investors are shown outside a closed bank (fig. 27).⁷⁶ Alongside the positive imagery of basketball players, Indianapolis 500 racecars, and advances in chemistry, *Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought* shows signs of the Great Depression. People line up for unemployment relief, a sign reads "No Help Wanted," newspaper headlines show the concerns of the Depression, and the future is indicated with a question mark (fig. 28). Despite the uncertainty of the future depicted in these scenes, the accompanying texts focus on achievements in science and industry, reassuring viewers that by placing their trust in Work and Thought, there is "hope to overbalance every counsel of despair."⁷⁷

The two threads of the story, cultural and industrial, matched chronologically and visually as they progressed down the hall. The Civil War served as a significant historical marker. Represented halfway through both cycles, the billowing black smoke-cloud served as an unmistakable symbol of the War's destruction, reflected on either side of the hall (fig. 29).⁷⁸ Such visual parallelism was present throughout the entire length of the murals, and the formal similarities of figures and gestures across the hall strengthened the connection between the two sequences and invited viewers to compare themes.⁷⁹ Visitors could purchase Chambers' guide to the murals for fifty cents to aid their understanding of

⁷⁶ David Laurance Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933), 44.

⁷⁷ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933), 45.

⁷⁸ Doss, *Politics of Modernism*, 102.

⁷⁹ Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 155.

“the story” of Indiana.⁸⁰ Chambers’ guidebook reinforced the visual cues in the mural, indicating the two sets of panels as parallel narratives, with the viewer passing between them. Chambers’ guide differentiates between “Cultural” and “Industrial” panels, which Chambers individually titled and numbered one through eleven. The text alternates between the cultural and industrial histories, further guiding the viewers’ experience.

As Nanette Esseck Brewer points out in her essay “Benton as Hoosier Historian: Constructing a Visual Narrative in the Indiana Murals,” this guided educational experience was informed by new ideas in education about history, particularly those of John Dewey.⁸¹ Benton’s choice to show history as the activities of average citizens paralleled Dewey’s philosophy of education, which encouraged experiential learning. Benton explained in his personal account of American Regionalism: “My original purpose was to present a peoples’ history in contrast to the conventional histories which generally spotlighted great men, political and military events, and successions of ideas. I wanted to show that people’s behaviors, their action on the opening land, was the primary reality of American life.”⁸² Benton’s choice to represent a social history deviated from traditional history painting as well as from standard United States history textbooks, which emphasized the “expert guidance of American elites” in the shaping of America’s history.⁸³ Benton was aided in his conception of a “peoples’ history” when he created illustrations for the revisionist textbook *We, the People*, a Marxist history of the United

⁸⁰ Brewer, “Hoosier Historian,” 138.

⁸¹ Brewer, “Hoosier Historian,” 137.

⁸² Benton, “American Regionalism,” 149.

⁸³ Doss, “Action, Agency, Affect,” 132.

States by Leo Huberman in 1932, just prior to the Indiana commission.⁸⁴ The text presents average working people as the builders of the nation while acknowledging their exploitation by an elite minority. The book was immensely popular with leftists, and it was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.⁸⁵ Although Benton's illustrations for *We, the People* are very similar in theme to the Indiana murals, Brewer notes that "the national scope of Huberman's book and his diatribe against the oppression of the masses at the hands of the capitalist system were not part of Benton's agenda for his story of Indiana," and only a few subjects from these illustrations are directly repeated in the Indiana murals.⁸⁶

Benton's history was experiential as well as illustrative, two key concepts in Dewey's theories of education.⁸⁷ Visitors became actively involved as they made their way through the multimedia experience of the historic drama expressed in images and words. They were surrounded by depictions of ordinary people in motion. Wallace Richards commented on the dynamic quality of the mural, "there is in it tremendous vigor, not a placid figure, and a freshness and force of color that is wholly remarkable."⁸⁸ Aside from several major historical figures, Benton's people came from sketches of

⁸⁴ Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 144. Leo Huberman, *We, the People*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932).

⁸⁵ Adams, *American Original*, 169. The book is a precursor to Howard Zinn's famous revisionist textbook, *A People's History of the United States*, first published in 1980.

⁸⁶ Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 145.

⁸⁷ Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 147-148.

⁸⁸ Wallace Richards, "General Information Concerning the Indiana Exhibits at a Century of Progress," ca. 1933, typescript, Richards Papers, AAA, 2, quoted in Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 164.

Hoosiers that he made during his travels through the state in preparation for the murals.⁸⁹ In this way Benton blurred the lines between past and present. As they walked between images of the past, visitors might recognize themselves reflected in the faces depicted in the murals and also see themselves as makers of history with the ability to shape the future.

In “Thomas Hart Benton and the Melodrama of Democracy,” Casey Nelson Blake makes an argument for the connection between Benton’s murals and the tradition of the melodrama. Noting that Benton envisioned history as “a continuous flow of action,”⁹⁰ Blake explains, “The idea of public art as drama [...] was central to the aesthetic position that [Lewis] Mumford, John Dewey, and many others articulated in the 1930s.”⁹¹ Blake argues that Benton’s Indiana murals drew on common themes of melodrama—Native American hunters, pioneers setting the land, the Civil War governor leading men into battle, and the young Abraham Lincoln reading—in a “series of dramatically staged vignettes.”⁹² By presenting the narrative of Indiana history as a melodrama, a manner of storytelling familiar to viewers in 1933, viewers had the reassurance that despite the misfortunes encountered could be rectified with a return to the values of the past.⁹³

⁸⁹ Doss, “Action, Agency, Affect,” 132.

⁹⁰ Benton, “A Dream Fulfilled,” 49.

⁹¹ Casey Nelson Blake, “Thomas Hart Benton and the Melodrama of Democracy,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (2009), 172.

⁹² Blake, “Melodrama of Democracy,” 175.

⁹³ Blake, “Melodrama of Democracy,” 177-178.

While Blake focuses on the relationship of Benton's murals to melodrama in theater and cinema, I would suggest a connection between Benton's dramatic representation of Indiana's history and another theatrical tradition—that of the historic pageant. Although the phenomenon had fallen out of favor as a central feature of large civic celebrations by WWII,⁹⁴ the 1930s audience was familiar with historical pageantry and its role in the commemoration and transmission of history. Like Benton's Indiana murals, these pageants conveyed a historical narrative visually, with a focus on the activities of local people and their role in shaping history. Historical pageants were often performed as a part of a commemorative celebration, with progress as a common theme. The "Wings of a Century" pageant, a grand outdoor performance showing the development of transportation, was a popular feature at the Century of Progress exposition.⁹⁵ Enthusiasm for historical pageantry began to build around 1910 and continued over the next several years, gaining extreme popularity in celebrations of various types. In 1913 the American Pageant Association was formed in order to set standards for the structure and performance of historical pageants, and to train and certify "pageant-masters," experts in historical pageantry who could run the event.⁹⁶ Like Benton's murals, American historical pageantry presented its audience with a usable past and showed the role of average people in shaping history. Glassberg explains that historical pageants "focused on a past that included the town's development along

⁹⁴ David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1.

⁹⁵ Cheryl Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 35.

⁹⁶ Glassberg, *Historical Pageantry*, 105-108.

economic and social as well as political lines; they purportedly told the story of all local residents rather than only the elite, and they extended forward to address present public questions and point the way to future reform.”⁹⁷ Historical pageants represented an overarching theme of progress in a sequence of episodes carried out by local people. The performance of these scenes, typically outdoors to accommodate the number of performers and audience members, showed the advancement of history on the same ground, which put “past, present and future within a single framework, offering a coherent plot within which local residents could interpret their recent experiences and envision their future progress.”⁹⁸ In a similar vein, by standing in the center of Indiana Hall, visitors could, as Kasson has written, “look from one side of the mural to the other to experience the simultaneous pull of past and future.”⁹⁹ The scenes in the Indiana murals are set outdoors on the Indiana landscape, punctuated with trees and architecture. The scenes appear to take place on the same ground, with a red, white and blue sky running across the upper register of the entire mural (fig. 30). Even if not directly influenced by historical pageant performances, the Indiana murals bear some resemblance to the brief but powerful cultural phenomenon of historical pageantry.

William Chauncy Langdon, the American Pageant Association’s first president, described the historical pageant as “the drama of the history and life of a community showing how the character of that community as a community has been developed

⁹⁷ Glassberg, *Historical Pageantry*, 147.

⁹⁸ Glassberg, *Historical Pageantry*, 139.

⁹⁹ Kasson, “Looking Forward,” 148.

[...].”¹⁰⁰ This is not unlike Benton’s description of history in his murals as “a social progression” in which “man and his tools [...] changed the face of a continent.”¹⁰¹ In “The Centennial Pageant for Indiana: Suggestions for Its Performance,” published in *Indiana Magazine of History* in 1915, George McReynolds urges Hoosiers to celebrate the Indiana Centennial (1916) with a historical pageant. He explains, “the citizens of this commonwealth can well afford in the year, 1916, to take a look backward, frankly acknowledge the mistakes of the past, but, receiving inspiration from the good achieved through important historical events and through the lives of Indiana’s noble men and women, look resolutely forward to a bigger and better future.”¹⁰² During the Indiana Centennial celebration, “communities organized fairs, marched in parades, and dramatized the pioneer era by way of elaborate outdoor pageants and parades.”¹⁰³ The celebration took place seventeen years before the Century of Progress exhibition, placing it within the lifetime and memory of many visitors to the fair from Indiana.

The Wings of a Century outdoor stage performance was a central event of the Century of Progress Exposition. It showed the development of transportation during an hour-long theatrical show with two-hundred actors, and multiple wagons, trains, automobiles, and airplanes. The performance portrayed significant events in the history of American transportation, such as the building of the transcontinental railroad and the

¹⁰⁰ George McReynolds, “The Centennial Pageant for Indiana: Suggestions for its Performance,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 11, no. 3 (1915), 248.

¹⁰¹ Benton, “A Dream Fulfilled,” 49.

¹⁰² McReynolds, “Centennial Pageant,” 261.

¹⁰³ James Joseph Buss, *Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes*, 2011), 1.

Wright brothers' first flight.¹⁰⁴ Typical of historical pageantry, the performance tracked the changes from a historic and "primitive" past, with Native Americans riding horses and paddling canoes, and ended with a flashy procession of the most recent designs of cars, trains, and planes (fig. 31).¹⁰⁵

Visitors from Indiana and across the country who visited the Indiana exhibition and saw Benton's murals associated them with commemoration of the past and celebration of the progress of the state and the nation. As they exited the exhibition hall, visitors would respond by contemplating the role of their history in modern life. The exhibit was designed to elicit such a reaction from viewers; and the theme of the fair and its other exhibitions, as well as ubiquitous message of the usable past in 1930s America evidenced by the Wings of a Century pageant, reinforced this response from those who saw the Indiana murals.

If there remained any question about what the visitors were to gain from viewing the murals, Indiana's Governor Paul McNutt made it clear in his introductory statement in the mural guidebook:

It is particularly fitting that the people of Indiana and America should celebrate at this time a Century of Progress. In all the history of the nation there have been no days more critical or calling for more tenacious willpower than those through which we are now living. [...] those who come harboring timidity must gain new determination and strength of purpose from the gigantic achievements which they will see. Courage will overcome any crisis this nation can encounter.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ganz, *1933 Chicago World's Fair*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ *Official Guide Book of the Fair: 1933*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ Paul McNutt, introduction to *Indiana: A Hoosier History; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton*, by David Laurance Chambers (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933), 1.

Together, the imagery in the murals and their accompanying texts crafted the message of hopeful determination, praising the strength and ingenuity of average citizens as the creators of history. The murals' message, conveyed through images and texts, echoed the goal of the Century of Progress Exposition to inspire "optimism embedded in scientific, technological, and democratic ideals."¹⁰⁷

Although Benton's murals received a positive response from the majority of visitors,¹⁰⁸ many took offense. Wilbur Peat, an early supporter of Benton's commission, had assured that Benton's murals would be "powerful," "utterly frank," and "outstanding among the fair exhibits." But he admitted, "One thing is certain—his murals are going to make a lot of people mad."¹⁰⁹ The heated controversy over the Indiana murals, characterized by the outrage of people who felt misrepresented, is not a unique occurrence. Michael Kammen devotes a whole chapter to mural controversies in his book *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture*, in which he explains, "The episodic narrative of public murals in the United States since the early 1930s has involved intermittent censorship of history, ideology, nudity, and sexuality—but the first two with much greater frequency than the latter."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ganz, *1933 Chicago World's Fair*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Doss, *Politics of Modernism*, 111.

¹⁰⁹ "State Artists Protest Mural Painter Choice," Lieber diary, 1933, Richard Lieber Papers, Lily Library, quoted in Foster, "Indiana Murals," 13.

¹¹⁰ Michael G. Kammen, *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 146.

Critical responses to Benton's previous mural works were mostly favorable up until the completion of *The Arts of Life in America*, at which point reaction became divided, and positive reviews of his murals were met with equally strong negative comment.¹¹¹ While some praised their excellence, others judged them to be vulgar and poorly executed.¹¹² Benton's subsequent murals met with similar debate, and the Indiana murals were no exception.

One of the main points of dispute was a scene in the panel, "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, and the Press," which shows members of the Ku Klux Klan engaged in a cross-burning (fig. 32). As chief of the commission, Lieber had argued with Benton that the Klan scene should be left out of the murals, because he felt it would reflect poorly on the state.¹¹³ However, some of Indiana's politicians insisted it be included. In his autobiography, *An Artist in America*, Benton explains:

They being newly elected Democrat politicians, while the Klan business occurred under Republican auspices, promptly informed me that it was of immense importance and had nearly ruined the state. When they got through airing the importance of the Klan, I shouldn't have dared leave the organization out of a factual history of Indiana.¹¹⁴

Many visitors to the pavilion found the scene offensive, viewing it as an endorsement of the Klan, or a statement that people from Indiana are racist.¹¹⁵ Other scenes that incited controversy included what was described by reviewers as an unattractive pioneer woman

¹¹¹ Adams, *American Original*, 160.

¹¹² Adams, *American Original*, 189-190.

¹¹³ Doss, *Politics of Modernism*, 111.

¹¹⁴ Benton, *An Artist in America*, 253-254.

¹¹⁵ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 21.

with large feet and clingy dress, as well as a mineworker throwing a rock at a soldier during a strike in the Terre Haute mining field (figs. 33-34).¹¹⁶

Benton's rock-throwing miner may seem fairly innocuous today, but this scene was representative of the extreme unrest and frequent violence occurring in Terre Haute mines in the years leading up to the fair. A front-page *Chicago Tribune* article from the previous summer headlines: "Fatal Battle On at Indiana Mine: Eight Hour Gun Fight Waged By Picketers."¹¹⁷ The article reports four men killed and eight wounded, and remarks on the similarity of the attack to a 1922 tragedy that left twenty-three men dead. Viewers recalled violent disputes like this one when they encountered Benton's rock-throwing scene. As Chambers states in the mural guide, "To the layman coal mining is synonymous with strikes, with long and bitter disputes of capital and labor."¹¹⁸ Lieber expressed concern that the scene would offend Indiana Governor Paul McNutt, but the governor was apparently not bothered by it, possibly due to Benton's inclusion of McNutt's portrait elsewhere in the murals (fig. 35).¹¹⁹ The scene, which also included a figure thought to be the Socialist Eugene Debs, led some to label Benton a socialist.¹²⁰ According to Baigell, Benton was consistently left-leaning in his politics, and he may

¹¹⁶ Virginia Gardner, "Indiana's Art Stirs Conflict at World Fair: Conservatives Find it Too Modern," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1933.

¹¹⁷ "Fatal Battle on at Indiana Mine: Eight Hour Gun Fight Waged by Picketers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1932.

¹¹⁸ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*; 46.

¹¹⁹ Adams, *American Original*, 205.

¹²⁰ Matthew Baigell, "Thomas Hart Benton and the Left," in *Thomas Hart Benton: Artist, Writer, and Intellectual*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt and Mary K. Dains (Columbia, MO: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1989), 9.

have been a Communist in the early 1920s, but broke ties with the party by the end of the decade.¹²¹ Despite his association with the left, according to Doss, Benton “viewed [...] leftist alignment with radical politics with alarm” and he was “deeply troubled that leftists were not supporting New Deal efforts to reform capitalism [...]”¹²² He often found himself at odds with the left due to his association with American regionalism, which left-wing art circles characterized as provincial and “antimodern.”¹²³ Another contributing factor, as Baigell observes, was for his disdain for “left-wing art based on political theories not rooted in American experience.”¹²⁴

The accusation that Benton’s murals contained socialist propaganda directly followed a mural controversy involving similar allegations, but with more serious consequences. In spring of 1933, as Benton’s Indiana mural was nearing completion, Diego Rivera’s mural *Man at the Crossroads*, commissioned for the lobby of the RCA building at Rockefeller Center in New York, caused controversy. Despite having approved Rivera’s sketches for the mural, which featured a May Day parade on Red Square, the Rockefellers asked Rivera to remove a portrait of Lenin from the mural. Indych-López argues that the Rockefellers’ decision to censor the mural was related to a controversy that erupted the year before. Nelson Rockefeller backed an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *Murals by American Painters and Photographers* (1932), in order to ease tensions that arose when no artists from the United States were selected for

¹²¹ Baigell, “Benton and the Left,” 1-5.

¹²² Doss, *Politics of Modernism*, 115.

¹²³ Doss, *Politics of Modernism*, 124-125.

¹²⁴ Baigell, “Benton and the Left,” 11.

the Rockefeller Center commission.¹²⁵ One work in the exhibition featured an insulting caricature of Nelson Rockefeller's grandfather, initiating a debate in the press. Hoping to escape further ridicule, the Rockefellers chose not to act on it. However, some took their silence as approval for the artist's communist views. Unwilling to be mocked in the press a second time, the Rockefellers insisted that Rivera remove Lenin's portrait.¹²⁶ When Rivera refused to change it, he was dismissed from the assignment. The mural, only partially complete, was covered until its destruction was ordered in early 1934.¹²⁷ Ironically, given the criticism that continued to be wielded against Benton's own work, Benton refused to protest the mural's destruction, stating, "I respect Rivera as an artist [...] but I have no time to enter into affairs concerning him, because I am intensely interested in the development of an art which is of, and adequately represents, the United States—my own art."¹²⁸ Benton's indifference to the destruction of the mural only further alienated him from leftist artists.¹²⁹

A *Chicago Tribune* article from 1933, "Indiana's Art Stirs Conflict at World Fair," deals with the murals' controversial status in the Indiana pavilion. The author,

¹²⁵ Anna Indych-López, "Mexican Muralism in the United States: Controversies, Paradoxes, and Publics," in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Leonard Folgarait, and Robin Adèle Greeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 212.

¹²⁶ Indych-López, "Mexican Muralism," 213.

¹²⁷ Indych-López, "Mexican Muralism," 210-211.

¹²⁸ Thomas Hart Benton, "Art and Nationalism" in *A Thomas Hart Benton Miscellany: Selections from His Published Opinions, 1916-1960*, ed. Matthew Baigell (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1971), 57-58.

¹²⁹ Baigell, "Benton and the Left," 13.

Virginia Gardner, quoted Wallace Richards' defense of Thomas Hart Benton, mentioning the artist's award of the New York Architectural League gold medal for decorative painting the year before. Richards stated that Benton is "not a socialist" and that the murals, paid for with state money, were not a work of propaganda, but "an accurate pictorial representation" of the state's history.¹³⁰ Richards addressed two controversial aspects of the murals, the conflict in the mines and the Ku Klux Klan gathering, pointing out that despite their unsavory content, the events were truthfully recorded. He also cited the hospital scene with a white nurse caring for a black child as evidence of Benton's desire to record the state's social progress (fig. 36).¹³¹ Perhaps in anticipation of those who would object to the unflattering scenes of the state's history, Lieber's forward to Chambers' guidebook addressed some of the murals' controversial aspects with the following statement:

It is not necessary always to agree with Benton. Great works are often damned as much as praised, but no one may deny that the fragrance of the broken soil, the tang of the burned clearing, the sweat of the face, that the flight of roaring ambitions, that the depth of pain and despair as well as exultation of success are not contained in his earnest presentation of the growth and power of our state.¹³²

But for the most part, visitors from Indiana—and around the country—liked the murals. Richards had been monitoring visitors' reactions and called the project "extremely successful in having won over half the visitors to an understanding of an exhibit modern

¹³⁰ Virginia Gardner, "Indiana's Art Stirs Conflict at World Fair: Conservatives Find it Too Modern," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1933.

¹³¹ Virginia Gardner, "Indiana's Art Stirs Conflict at World Fair: Conservatives Find it Too Modern," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1933.

¹³² Lieber, "Foreword," 3.

in atmosphere and often brutally truthful in content.”¹³³ The *Los Angeles Times* commended Lieber for having the “courage to commission a great work of art,” and praised the murals as Benton’s “finest work.”¹³⁴ The Indiana murals greatly advanced Benton’s career, and the national attention secured his place at the forefront of American mural painting.¹³⁵ The controversy surrounding his work only generated more attention for the artist. In *An Artist in America* Benton recalls being “constantly called on for lectures,” and in 1934 he was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine (fig. 37).¹³⁶ But as Benton’s fame grew, the Indiana mural attracted less attention.

When A Century of Progress concluded in November of 1933, there was no plan in place for the future home of the murals.¹³⁷ Numerous suggestions were made, including the John Herron Art Institute and Butler University, but none were carried out because, as Foster has concluded, they “required new expenditures, and the idea that the murals would be featured in any projected state building revived the old protests.”¹³⁸ Some Indiana artists involved in the initial protests of Benton’s commission called for the murals to be demolished.¹³⁹ Awaiting a decision, the panels were put into storage for a

¹³³ Doss, *Politics of Modernism*, 111.

¹³⁴ Lawson F. Cooper, “Benton’s Indiana Murals Called His Finest Work: Eleven Panels at World’s Fair Showing Hoosier History Will be Placed in State Capitol,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1933.

¹³⁵ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 23.

¹³⁶ Benton, *An Artist in America*, 257-258.

¹³⁷ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 24.

¹³⁸ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 24.

¹³⁹ Adams, *American Original*, 207.

year in the Capital Transfer Company warehouse in Indianapolis, after which time a new location had to be found due to storage costs.¹⁴⁰ The murals were shipped to the Manufacturers Building at the State Fair Ground in Indianapolis, a building that functioned as a barn.¹⁴¹ It was not until 1938 that the murals were donated to Indiana University by Governor M. Clifford Townsend, and the following year the panels were transferred to Bloomington to await installation in Indiana University's new auditorium.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Margaret Contompasis, "The Physical History and Conservation Treatment of Thomas Hart Benton's Indiana Murals," in *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 123.

¹⁴¹ Adams, *American Original*, 207.

¹⁴² Adams, *American Original*, 207.

CHAPTER 2

THE MURALS AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Benton hoped that his murals would have a suitable home at the conclusion of the fair. The project for Indiana's exhibition at A Century of Progress was designed with the intention that the murals would be permanently installed somewhere in Indiana after the fair and serve as the subject of study for future generations.¹⁴³

Herman B Wells, who became Indiana University's eleventh president in 1937, had seen Benton's murals in the Indiana pavilion. In early 1938, after reading an article on the murals in the *Indianapolis Times*—"Six-Ton, \$20,000 Mural History of State Decaying at Fair Grounds Awaiting Home Big Enough to Hold It"—Wells searched, without success, for a site on Indiana University's campus large enough for the murals.¹⁴⁴ That summer Wells' hopes were renewed when Indiana University (IU) received funding for a multipurpose auditorium building.¹⁴⁵ He contacted Indiana Governor Cliff Townsend and offered the murals a home at Indiana University. Wells' offer was appealing, as the murals' storage had been a source of frustration for the state.¹⁴⁶ Benton was happy with Wells' proposal to display the murals at IU permanently, especially given their educational purpose.¹⁴⁷ While Wells made legal arrangements for IU's possession of

¹⁴³ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 24.

¹⁴⁴ James H. Capshew, "The Campus as Pedagogical Agent: Herman B Wells, Cultural Entrepreneurship, and the Benton Murals," *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (2009), 191.

¹⁴⁵ Capshew, "Campus as Pedagogical Agent," 191-192.

¹⁴⁶ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 25.

the murals, the architects were at work on a design for the auditorium that would integrate Benton's murals.¹⁴⁸

Although Wells had waited to ensure that the necessary space would be available before requesting the murals for IU, not all of the panels were displayed together when they were finally installed. After drawing and revising several plans and consulting with Benton, the architects of the auditorium produced a design that would allow for the majority of the panels to be installed in the entrance hall of the auditorium, to be known as the "Hall of Murals" (fig. 38).¹⁴⁹ The contribution of the murals was officially announced in 1938, and installation at the University began in 1940.¹⁵⁰ The panels were placed in three locations on IU's campus in Bloomington, where they remain to the present: the IU Auditorium, the University Theater (now the IU Cinema), and Woodburn Hall.¹⁵¹

The Hall of Murals contains scenes two through nine of both the Industrial and Cultural sequences (fig. 39). These panels originally lined the north and south walls of the Indiana exhibition hall in Chicago. Wells was aware of the murals' dimensions, which he had requested in 1938,¹⁵² and the architects of the auditorium designed it with

¹⁴⁷ Kathryn Lofton and Matthew Pratt Guterl, "Introduction: The Benton Murals of Indiana" *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (2009), 125.

¹⁴⁸ Capshew, "Campus as Pedagogical Agent," 192.

¹⁴⁹ Capshew, "Campus as Pedagogical Agent," 193-194.

¹⁵⁰ Foster, "Indiana Murals," 25.

¹⁵¹ Lofton and Guterl, "Introduction," 125.

¹⁵² Capshew, "Campus as Pedagogical Agent," 191.

the knowledge that it would feature Benton's massive murals. This raises the question of why all of the panels were not placed together in the Hall of Murals. Practical and aesthetic interests likely came into play when determining the final arrangement of the panels in the room. Wells' communication with a state employee about the dimensions of the murals indicates that in order to display the entire work, a room would require 220 linear feet of wall space.¹⁵³ The Hall of Murals in the IU Auditorium has a 241-foot perimeter, but the wall space is interrupted on the east wall by two doorways at the top of the stairs. The west wall has approximately 19 feet of open wall space on either side of the mural segment (fig. 40). Since each of the eight panels in the auditorium contains two scenes and is eighteen feet wide,¹⁵⁴ two more mural panels might have fit on the west wall. However, an uneven number of scenes on the east and west walls would disrupt the overall balance of the work, which was crucial to Benton's theory of composition.¹⁵⁵ The addition of two panels to one of the walls might also have upset the chronological progression of the scenes. Although the Cultural and Industrial panel pairs are not matched across the hall with the exactness that they were in Chicago, they still move chronologically across the hall in this arrangement.

¹⁵³ Capshew, "Campus as Pedagogical Agent," 191. According to Foster the murals were 232 feet long, the exact linear footage of the perimeter of the Indiana pavilion: 78 by 38 feet. Foster, "Indiana Murals," 11. This is twelve feet longer than the figure of 220 feet that was given to Wells. It is plausible that the figure of 220 feet takes into consideration the space on the entry wall that was occupied by an introductory statement, between the first of the Cultural and Industrial panels. This panel covered approximately one third of the 38-foot wall, which explains the missing twelve feet in the recommendation given to Wells.

¹⁵⁴ Contompasis, "Physical History," 116.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, *American Original*, 110-115.

The remaining mural panels were placed in nearby buildings on campus. The opening pair of panels, “The Mound Builders” and “The Indians,” and the final two panels, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” and “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work,” were installed in the University Theatre, now the IU Cinema (fig. 41). The structure, which was part of the IU Auditorium building project, is attached to the side of the IU Auditorium opposite the Hall of Murals. The tenth panels of each sequence, “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” and “Electric Power, Motor Cars, Steel,” were selected for the newly constructed Business and Economics Building (now called Woodburn Hall), finished in 1940¹⁵⁶ (fig. 42).¹⁵⁷ Two sections of “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” and “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” that were sized to fit over the doorway were left out of the new arrangement all together (fig. 43). These sections, along with the Indiana dunes landscape partition were placed in storage at Indiana University, but have since been lost.¹⁵⁸ Benton acknowledged that these segments were omitted, but he held that the new arrangement maintained “the essential rhythms of the composition.”¹⁵⁹

The IU Auditorium opened in March of 1941, with multiple days of celebratory events.¹⁶⁰ Benton, who had been present for the installation and retouching of the murals,

¹⁵⁶ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 25. James H. Capshew, *Herman B Wells: The Promise of the American University* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 123.

¹⁵⁷ Chapter 3 examines in detail the omission of “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” from the Hall of Murals arrangement and the panel’s recent reception.

¹⁵⁸ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 32n65.

¹⁵⁹ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 25.

¹⁶⁰ Capshew, “Campus as Pedagogical Agent,” 194.

attended the dedication ceremony and expressed his gratitude to Wells.¹⁶¹ However, Benton was not given a chance to speak at the event, and he was vocal in his outrage concerning two urn-shaped light fixtures that blocked the view of the murals at the stairwells.¹⁶² The offensive lighting was removed, and Benton was invited back to the University to give a lecture for “Indiana Mural Day” in December.¹⁶³

The Hall of Murals in the Indiana University Auditorium is a rectangular space that measures 28½ by 92 feet, with a stepped ceiling measuring 35½ feet high at the center of the room and 32½ feet at the walls (fig. 44). The mural panels are installed fifteen feet above the floor,¹⁶⁴ five higher than they were in the Indiana pavilion.¹⁶⁵ The majority of the panels are on the east and west walls. Five pairs of double-doors on the west wall are the main entryways to the Auditorium. The panels on the east wall are set above three pairs of doors, leading into the IU Auditorium’s “Grand Foyer,” with a coat check and elevator on either side of the doors. The north and south walls of the Hall of Murals each feature two scenes set above a staircase. The scenes from the Cultural sequence begin on the east wall, which visitors face when they enter the auditorium. The sequence starts with scene two, “The French” at the southeast corner and continues along the east wall through scene seven, “Woman’s Place” at the northeast corner of the room (fig. 45-47). The Cultural sequence continues with scenes eight and nine, “Leisure and

¹⁶¹ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 25-26.

¹⁶² Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 26.

¹⁶³ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 27.

¹⁶⁴ Contompasis, “Physical History,” 116.

¹⁶⁵ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 12.

Literature” and “Colleges and City Life,” on the north wall (fig. 48). The Industrial sequence starts on the south wall with scenes two and three, “The Fur Traders” and “The Pioneers” (fig. 49). It continues on the west wall with “Home Industry” and ends with scene nine, “Coal, Gas, Oil, Brick” on the west wall in the northwest corner (figs. 50-52).

A number of people were involved in determining this arrangement of panels at Indiana University, including the architects of the auditorium, Wells, and Benton himself. Benton’s statement about maintaining the “essential rhythms of the composition” suggests that one of his primary concerns was that the formal elements of the arrangement have a similar effect to the original presentation. “The Mechanics of Form Organization” details Benton’s theory of composition based on the principles of equilibrium, sequence, and rhythm.¹⁶⁶ In “Benton as Hoosier Historian: Constructing a Visual Narrative in the Indiana Murals,” Brewer describes Benton’s application of these principles in the structure of the Indiana murals. Brewer notes Benton’s use of “static elements” including “full-length standing figures and a series of trees, poles, and a central half wall” in order to “anchor the rhythmical sequences.”¹⁶⁷ It was this “rhythm” of the composition that is preserved in the new arrangement of the panels in the Hall of Murals. In the Hall of Murals, as in the original arrangement, the composition is punctuated with static vertical anchors, and dark billowing forms of smoke and treetops interrupt the expanse of sky. The Hall of Murals arrangement also preserved the visual parallelism of the original composition in that forms and gestures connect the cultural and industrial sequences across the hall. Some examples in the Hall of Murals include: the full length

¹⁶⁶ Adams, *American Original*, 110-115.

¹⁶⁷ Brewer, “Hoosier Historian,” 162-163.

figures of Abraham Lincoln (“Early Schools...Communities”) and Governor Oliver Morton (“Civil War”), a man signing papers (“Reformer and Squatters”) and a railroad worker (“Expansion”) who retain a similar hunched-over position, a trapper (“The French”) and a woman at her spinning wheel (“Home Industry”) whose poses are remarkably alike, and a farmer riding a mower (“The Farmer Up and Down”) across from a couple in horse-drawn buggy in town in (“Woman’s Place”) (fig. 53).

Although Benton felt he had successfully maintained the formal effect of the original exhibition, the murals’ educational aspects were altered by the context of their new location. The design of the exhibition space in the Indiana pavilion, with its parallel histories of industry and culture, chronological progression down the hall, and explanatory labels and book, created a guided experience with specific educational goals in line with those of the Century of Progress Exposition. When the murals moved to Indiana University, they became subject to a new set of motivations: those of the university. From their acquisition to the present day, the university has framed the murals with a context suitable for the interests of the university—responsibility to preserve this significant piece of Indiana’s history, to educate students and other visitors about the murals’ cultural significance, and to emphasize the university’s dedication to the arts.

The acquisition of the murals was part of Wells’ “campaign to expand and beautify the campus,” and the murals were key assets in Wells’ development of what would later be known as the “Fine Arts Plaza” at Indiana University.¹⁶⁸ Wells’ interest in dividing the panels among three locations may have been in part to distribute Indiana University’s new treasure around the recently expanded areas of the campus. Wells

¹⁶⁸ Lofton and Guterl, “Introduction,” 120.

believed that the university campus should create an environment that would “inspire students” to imagine their futures and accomplish great things.¹⁶⁹ In *Herman B Wells: The Promise of the American University*, James Capshew explains, “Wells clearly saw his role as a leader in the cultivation of cultural heritage, reframing and incorporating it into the liberal arts context, and thus making it available for the education of all citizens of the commonwealth.”¹⁷⁰ Central to Wells’ vision of the university as the “cultural crossroads of Indiana” was the establishment of a university art museum, and by 1940 Wells had drawn plans for one at IU.¹⁷¹ The Indiana University Art Museum began in 1941 as a small 20 by 50 foot gallery with only enough room for temporary exhibitions, and the development of a permanent collection did not start until 1962 with the opening of the IU Fine Arts Building.¹⁷² Not only were Benton’s Indiana murals one of the university’s first major art acquisitions, but they were also an important artifact of Indiana history and culture.¹⁷³ The murals’ size and division into separate panels meant that they could easily be dispersed throughout several buildings.

¹⁶⁹ Herman B Wells, “State of the University,” June 2, 1962, President Herman B Wells Speeches, 1937-1962, IU Archives, Bloomington, IN, quoted in Capshew, “Campus as Pedagogical Agent,” 180.

¹⁷⁰ Capshew, *Promise of American University*, 128.

¹⁷¹ Henry R. Hope, “The Indiana University Art Museum,” *Art Journal* 30, no. 2 (Winter, 1970-1971), 170.

¹⁷² Henry R. Hope, “College Museum Notes,” *Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (Autumn, 1962), 44.

¹⁷³ Abstract painter Stuart Davis’s *Swing Landscape* (1938) is considered to be the IU art museum’s first acquisition. The university obtained it in 1941, shortly after the installation of Benton’s murals. Adelheid M. Gealt et al., *Masterworks from the Indiana University Art Museum*, ed. Linda Baden (Bloomington: Indiana University Art Museum, 2007), 340. Davis and Benton were bitter rivals; although both were interested the

Wells' legacy of dedication to the arts remains significant to the University's goals, and the murals are an important part of it. In his 2008 foreword to *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, IU Vice President for Academic Affairs and Chancellor, explained the continued significance of the Indiana murals to IU's mission: "The placement of the campus's most treasured artwork in a public place, open and accessible and often used by townspeople and visitors as well as students, staff, and faculty, symbolizes IU's deep and enduring commitment to its artistic heritage."¹⁷⁴

Visitors to the Hall of Murals at IU are met with a vastly different experience than the 1933 Indiana pavilion exhibition. In the original presentation, viewers entered the room at the beginning of the chronological sequence, their path running parallel to the flow of time, and they exited at the depiction of the present day. In the Hall of Murals, the majority of the panels are on the east and west walls, with the narrative moving chronologically in a general south to north direction, while the majority of foot traffic is east/west, perpendicular to the chronology. Rather than marching with the flow of time, visitors pass through it (fig. 54).

Another major difference is the absence of the numerous texts that guided viewers through the 1933 exhibition. The large introductory statement and lengthy labels are replaced in the Hall of Murals with just two small plaques, one at each stairway (fig. 55).

principles formal organization and produced intricate rhythmic compositions, Davis believed these were best realized with modernist abstraction while Benton championed a representational style. Adams, *American Original*, 110-111.

¹⁷⁴ Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, foreword to *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 2.

They provide a brief explanation of the murals, including their commission for the Indiana pavilion at the 1933 World's Fair and Benton's dual narratives, with his emphasis on average citizens as makers of history. One plaque states that sixteen panels from the mural cycle are on display in the Hall of Murals, but does not specify the location of the rest.

Furthermore, the "starting point" of the sequences is more difficult to locate. The plaque on the staircase at the north wall indicates that the history "is told in two chronological narratives" which "unfold in opposite directions beginning in the southwest corner." While the plaque correctly indicates the two starting panels ("The Fur Traders" and "The French"), these panels are located at the southeast, not southwest, corner of the room (fig. 56). The arrangement of panels in the Hall of Murals complicates the original concept of the parallel histories of industry and culture, as the panels do not match up chronologically across the hall. Brewer explains the importance of the matching the murals' original location:

One of the things that enabled this dual history approach to work in the murals was the absolute parallelism (or symmetry) between many of the figures and historic buildings. Some of these images lined up across the exhibition hall often in almost exactly the same scale and poses [...] Not only did this device make it easier for visitors walking through the space to follow the chronological sequence, but it also allowed for implied comparisons between social themes such as life and death, work and religion, rich and poor, destruction and renewal.¹⁷⁵

In the Hall of Murals arrangement, figures match across the hall in different pairings, inviting new comparisons. The previously significant historical marker in the center of the parallel histories, the billowing smoke of the Civil War, is rendered ineffective for

¹⁷⁵ Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 155.

this purpose (fig. 57). Rather than the “absolute parallelism” described above, the arrangement of panels in the hall of murals is loosely chronological, moving from the south side of the room to the north side.

The murals are a source of pride at IU, and one of the university’s most important goals concerning the murals is to encourage an appreciation for them as a valuable part of Indiana’s and also the university’s history. When the donation in 2012 of Benton’s “America Today” murals to the Metropolitan Museum of Art was announced, IU was able to boast its own, larger, Benton murals. In the article “New York Crows Over What IU’s Long Had: Thomas Hart Benton Murals” in the Bloomington *Herald-Times*, IU curator Sherry Rouse elaborated, “The murals here are the most important art we have,” and Brewer, IU’s Benton scholar and curator at the IU Art Museum, called the murals “national treasures” of American art, noting that “they really are priceless [...] because there’s nothing like them that will ever come onto the market.”¹⁷⁶ The book *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, first published in 2000 and reprinted in 2008 in honor of the 75th anniversary of the murals, is available for purchase in the Indiana University Art Museum gift shop. Like Chambers’ guidebook at the Indiana pavilion, it is a resource for viewers who desire more thorough explanation of the murals.

The restructuring of scenes for the Hall of Murals utilizes viewers’ collective memory of history in a way that emphasizes certain themes of education and Indiana history. When viewers enter the IU Auditorium through the Hall of Murals, they face the image of a young Abraham Lincoln in “Early Schools...Communities” (fig. 58).

¹⁷⁶ Mike, “New York Crows Over What IU’s Long Had: Thomas Hart Benton Murals,” *The Herald – Times* (Bloomington, IN), Dec 16, 2012.

Positioned in the center of the east wall, and standing at over nine feet tall,¹⁷⁷ the figure is nearly impossible to miss. At the time Benton was painting, Lincoln was a relatively new addition to the fabric of Indiana's collective memory. Lincoln commemoration was initially monopolized by Illinois and Kentucky. The image exemplifies the induction of Lincoln into Indiana's collective memory as a symbol of the pioneer spirit whose time in Indiana was crucial to his success.

Increased public interest in Lincoln at the beginning of the 20th century reached its peak in the 1920s.¹⁷⁸ In Illinois, a widespread interest in commemorating Lincoln had already taken hold by the end of the nineteenth century,¹⁷⁹ and in historical pageants and celebrations, "Lincoln was continually invoked [...] as a symbol of pioneer pride and national loyalty."¹⁸⁰ Early biographers tended to focus on Lincoln's personal connection to both North and South through his birth in Kentucky and career in Illinois, and many omitted his time in Indiana as a child and young man. Others contrasted his "presidential greatness" with his "humble origins" in Indiana, with one 1889 biography portraying the state as a "stagnant, putrid pool."¹⁸¹ Members of the Southwestern Indiana Historical Society, founded in 1920, were concerned with this oversight, given that Lincoln had

¹⁷⁷ Doss, "Action, Agency, Affect," 136.

¹⁷⁸ Keith A. Erikson, *Everybody's History: Indiana's Lincoln Inquiry and the Quest to Reclaim a President's Past* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 38.

¹⁷⁹ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 120.

¹⁸⁰ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 119.

¹⁸¹ Erikson, *Everybody's History*, 4.

spent a quarter of his life in Indiana.¹⁸² When researching Indiana history, Benton consulted *Lincoln the Hoosier* (1928) by Southwestern Indiana Historical Society member Charles Vannest, and Benton’s rendering of Lincoln resembles the frontispiece of the book, an image of Charles S. Mulligan’s sculpture *The Railsplitter* (fig. 59).¹⁸³ Like Mulligan, Benton depicts Lincoln with an axe, but Benton includes a book in Lincoln’s other hand and places him in a scene depicting the sharing of knowledge on the frontier, indicated by the school, newspaper press, and scientific instruments. Biographers of the Southwest Indiana Historical Society found “the sources of Lincoln’s greatness in the collective environment on the frontier.”¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Benton’s portrayal of Lincoln emphasizes the significance of Lincoln’s Indiana surroundings in shaping his future. The caption in Chambers’ guide reinforced this idea as well as the concept that ordinary people—symbolized by the pioneers—had the ability to make history: “Abraham Lincoln spent the fourteen formative years of youth in Indiana. He was the very embodiment of the pioneer period, the highest development of the frontier type, ‘new birth of our soil, the first American.’”¹⁸⁵ For visitors to the World’s Fair, Indiana’s claim to Lincoln’s crucial developmental years was still new, but it has since been integrated into Hoosier history and memory. The image of Lincoln, one of the few historical portraits that Benton included in the design,¹⁸⁶ was an ideal choice for a central image in the arrangement in

¹⁸² Erikson, *Everybody's History*, 3-4.

¹⁸³ Brewer, “Hoosier Historian,” 145, 171n66.

¹⁸⁴ Erikson, *Everybody's History*, 124.

¹⁸⁵ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 19.

¹⁸⁶ Brewer, “Hoosier Historian,” 171n66.

the Hall of Murals. This placement was indicative of Lincoln's rising popularity. As Kammen explains, Lincoln became "the foremost American folk hero, immortalized above all by Carl Sandburg in six boxed volumes (1926-39)."¹⁸⁷

In the Hall of Murals arrangement, Lincoln's portrait interacts differently with the other panels in the room than it did in its original setting. Visitors to auditorium encounter Lincoln's image immediately, unlike visitors to the pavilion, who saw it along the walk down the long hall. Originally Lincoln was across from Industrial scene four, "Home Industry," which depicts activities of pioneer life, positioning Lincoln as an average person in Indiana, and placing the focus on the significance of his youth and education in Indiana (fig. 60). Although Benton did not depict Lincoln in Industrial scene six, "Civil War," Lincoln received mention in the caption at the fair: "On an April Sunday in 'sixty-five the murdered body of Abraham Lincoln, once a pioneer boy of Southern Indiana, lay in state under the dome of the Hoosier capitol."¹⁸⁸ In the Hall of Murals, the image of Lincoln is directly across the room from "Civil War" (fig. 61). This placement connects Lincoln to his role in the Civil War as emancipator and preserver of the Union. This positions Lincoln as an American hero, while acknowledging his foundational years on the Indiana frontier. Regarded as a symbol of pioneer strength and the "ongoing reality of ordinary people continually overcoming various kinds of difficulties," Lincoln served to inspire pride in Indiana's history and encourage students to achieve greatness.¹⁸⁹ Lincoln was one of the few historical figures Benton included in

¹⁸⁷ Kammen, *Mystic Chords*, 417.

¹⁸⁸ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 25.

¹⁸⁹ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 119-123.

the murals, as his goal was to show ordinary people as history makers. In this way the prominent placement of Lincoln in the Hall of Murals display and the emphasis on his heroism undermines to some extent Benton's initial intention.

Passage of time alters viewers' understanding of history. In "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," sociologist Michael Schudson explains: "The simple passage of time reshapes memory, in at least two respects. First, there is a loss of detail. Memory grows more vague. Second, there tends to be a loss of emotional intensity."¹⁹⁰ Both of these effects on viewers' memory of past events shape the way they understand Benton's murals. The murals' history no longer takes viewers through to the present day. Even in 1941 when the murals were newly installed on campus, the most recent scenes in the Hall of Murals were not representative of modern life. The final four scenes, closest to the present day at the time of installation, were placed elsewhere on campus.

Although viewers in 1933 were more familiar than today's viewers with what were recent events in time, many needed the assistance of Chambers' thorough captions and guidebook in order to understand the historical events depicted.¹⁹¹ As mentioned, these explanatory texts from the original installation were not included in the displays at IU. A thorough explanation of the murals—the history they depict and their original presentation—was not readily available to viewers at IU, until *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals* was published by the IU Art Museum in 2000, and *Indiana Magazine of History* published an issue devoted to the murals in 2009. Even with the recent

¹⁹⁰ Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel L. Schacter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 348.

¹⁹¹ Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 138.

publications and the content available on IU's website, casual visitors to the Hall of Murals and those passing through to attend events at the Auditorium do not have this information presented to them in immediate didactic wall labels. The arrangement requires interested viewers to seek it out by doing research or scheduling a tour.

One example of the reshaping of memory through the passage of time involves the changing significance of the railroad for viewers of the murals. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the railroad was one of the foremost symbols of cultural and technological advancement. Hailed by Walt Whitman as "Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—pulse of the continent," the steam engine was a source of awe and excitement.¹⁹² Benton's depictions of trains in the Industrial sequence of the murals show the development of rail transportation in Indiana. Industrial scene 5, "Internal Improvements," indicates the emergence of the railroad as a major force in Indiana's industrial growth, with the shift from steamboats and canals to rail (fig. 62).¹⁹³ Industrial scene 7, "Expansion," shows the construction of the railroad during the golden age of railroad expansion (fig. 63). The number four on the locomotive likely refers to the "Big Four" rail lines: Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis.¹⁹⁴ In the final panel of the Industrial sequence, "Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work" (currently located in the IU Cinema) Benton indicates the significance of rail transportation to Indiana's limestone

¹⁹² Walt Whitman, "To A Locomotive in Winter," in *Leaves of Grass: First and "Death-Bed" Editions: Additional Poems*, ed. Karen Karbiener (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004), 604.

¹⁹³ Kathleen A. Foster, "Industrial Panel 5: Internal Improvements," *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 40.

¹⁹⁴ Nanette Esseck Brewer, "Industrial Panel 7: Expansion," *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 44.

industry (fig. 64). Indiana was the largest producer of limestone in the country.¹⁹⁵ A truck appears along with the two trains, indicating the growing role of the automotive industry. At the time of the fair, Indiana had the most miles of paved highways of any state in the country.¹⁹⁶ Railroad construction continued to expand through the beginning of the twentieth century, until its slow decline in the 1920s as highway construction grew.¹⁹⁷ In his autobiography Benton explains his enduring fascination with the railroad: “To this day I cannot face an oncoming steam train without having itchy thrills run up and down my backbone. The automobile and the airplane have not been able to take away from it its old moving power as an assaulter of space and time.”¹⁹⁸ It is telling that “Expansion” was used for the cover of Chambers’ guidebook to represent the story of the state (fig. 65). The railroad was a powerful force for change in Indiana, and it “transformed the life from pioneer to industrial stage.”¹⁹⁹ This scene also indicates the profound effect on communication brought about with rail expansion. The caption explains, “Telegraph wires paralleling the tracks brought the news of the world to the Hoosier breakfast table.”²⁰⁰ Many fairgoers came to Chicago by train,²⁰¹ and the Official Guidebook of the

¹⁹⁵ Nanette Esseck Brewer, “Industrial Panel 11: Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work,” *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 52.

¹⁹⁶ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 47.

¹⁹⁷ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 46-47.

¹⁹⁸ Benton, *An Artist in America*, 71.

¹⁹⁹ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 21.

²⁰⁰ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 29.

²⁰¹ Lisa Diane Schrenk, *Building A Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago's 1933-34 World's Fair* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 16.

fair encouraged visitors to take advantage of the reduced rates offered by railroads for travelers headed to the exposition.²⁰² Many viewers at the fair, like Benton, would have firsthand experience of the greatness of the railroad, and the resulting “new communication network [that] revolutionized economic and social life in Indiana.”²⁰³

Not only is Benton’s most recent depiction of the railroad industry absent from the Hall of Murals composition, by the time the murals were installed at IU, viewers of Benton’s railroad scenes were familiar with a new type of locomotive: the streamliner. Named for their streamlined design, which created minimal wind resistance, these trains were made of lightweight stainless steel and operated with the power of internal combustion engines instead of steam (fig. 66). The first two streamliners, the Burlington Zephyr and the Union Pacific M 10,000, made appearances at the Century of Progress Exposition when it re-opened in 1934.²⁰⁴ The diesel-powered Zephyr made a nonstop trip from Denver to Chicago in record time, with an average speed was over seventy-seven miles per hour.²⁰⁵ Streamliners attained immediate popularity and started what historian Jeffrey Meikle refers to as “a streamlining mania” with the public.²⁰⁶ For viewers in the 1940s, the absence of this recent development placed Benton’s steam engines in the past.

²⁰² *Official Guide Book of the Fair: 1933*, 134.

²⁰³ Brewer, “Expansion,” 44.

²⁰⁴ PBS, “Streamliners: America's Lost Trains,” *American Experience*, Program Transcript, 2001, Accessed September 10, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/transcript/streamliners-transcript>.

²⁰⁵ Ganz, *1933 Chicago World's Fair*, 138.

²⁰⁶ PBS, “Streamliners: America's Lost Trains,” *American Experience*, Program Transcript, 2001, Accessed September 10, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/transcript/streamliners-transcript>.

With the decline of rail in favor of other means of transportation since the 1950s, steam locomotives are now viewed as outdated technology. Although its significance to the country's social and economic development is undeniable, steam power does not hold the same symbolic power for viewers in the present day.

Passage of time also reshapes memory by allowing individuals to look at history from viewpoints formerly disregarded. Schudson explains:

In an era of liberalization and the cultural enfranchisement of groups denied a voice in the past, a history told from the viewpoint of elite white males is rewritten from multiple viewpoints. Often new information becomes available about events experienced at the time through a veil of misinformation and ignorance.²⁰⁷

Themes of Settlement and the Frontier played a large part in Benton's Indiana murals, and more than half of the scenes in the Hall of Murals are related to themes of expansion and frontier settlement. For visitors to the 1933 World's Fair, the closing of the western frontier in 1890 was fewer than fifty years ago, "and so this symbol had a far greater immediacy than it does today."²⁰⁸ Historian James Joseph Buss observes that there was a culture of reverence for the pioneer, along with a "collective amnesia about the region's indigenous past."²⁰⁹

The 1933 wall label for "Internal Improvements," which depicts the forced removal of Native Americans, begins: "The Indian was doomed by the settler's hatred. Last of the tribes, the Potawatomi were led away to Kansas on a trail of death" (fig.

²⁰⁷ Schudson, "Distortion in Collective Memory," 349.

²⁰⁸ Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 31.

²⁰⁹ Buss, *Winning the West*, 212.

67).²¹⁰ Chambers' guidebook elaborated on the devastation: "The children and the old people, worn out by the trudging, unused to the fare, fell by the way, dying in numbers. [...] Every camp was a cemetery."²¹¹ The sudden disappearance of Native Americans from the narrative in this panel seems to indicate their marginalization in American society.

According to Brewer, in the introductory panels "The Mound Builders" and "The Indians," Benton wished to show "early man as a model of social harmony with nature, rather than as savage."²¹² In "Art for America: Race in Thomas Hart Benton's Murals, 1919-1936," Austen Barron Bailly noted that the figures in these two panels are, along with Lincoln, among a limited number of large-scale upright figures, which serve as vertical anchors to Benton's entire composition.²¹³ Bailly observed that although "Benton neglected to show modern Indians in the mural, [...] he required viewers to address the fact that American industry and culture were predicated on Native American precedent and achievement."²¹⁴ However, Benton's presentation of history in the murals follows the pattern of early history Buss describes as "beginning with the Indians, moving to a colonial period of conquest and confusion, and ending with a pioneer phase

²¹⁰ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 21.

²¹¹ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 25.

²¹² Brewer, "Hoosier Historian," 155.

²¹³ Austen Barron Bailly, "Art for America: Race in Thomas Hart Benton's Murals, 1919-1936," *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (2009): 163.

²¹⁴ Bailly, "Art for America," 163-164.

when steadfast Americans felled trees and tilled the soil.”²¹⁵ Benton’s statement in “A Dream Fulfilled” that he had hoped to show a progressive history beginning with “the savage Indian” supports this interpretation of the murals.²¹⁶

Benton’s portrayal of Native Americans in the Indiana murals differs from his earlier treatment of the subject in the *American Historical Epic*, which Benton set in the time before the United States became a nation. The *Epic* took a critical view of the exploitation of Native Americans and confronted then-contemporary understandings of “native” American as white, suggesting that American Indians as well as whites were founders of the nation.²¹⁷ Bailly argues that “the exposed racism, violence, and critique unexpectedly integral to the [*American Historical Epic*] overstepped conventional bounds for murals intended as public art and implicitly antagonized mainstream viewers,” and caused the artist to alter his treatment of race in subsequent murals in order to “connect more cooperatively with American audiences—implying, [...] a white-majority public.”²¹⁸ This desire to appeal to a more mainstream viewership might explain in part why the Indiana murals portray Native Americans in a manner typical of the time—as the unfortunate but necessary victims of white progress.

Three scenes in the Hall of Murals depict Native Americans, before they disappear from the narrative in “Internal Improvements.” The panels of the south wall of the Hall of Murals, “The Fur Traders” and “The Pioneers,” depict a fur trader giving

²¹⁵ Buss, *Winning the West*, 189.

²¹⁶ Benton, “A Dream Fulfilled,” 49.

²¹⁷ Bailly, “Art for America,” 153-154.

²¹⁸ Bailly, “Art for America,” 153-155.

alcohol to a Native American and Native Americans fighting with settlers, and in “The French,” two Native Americans kneel before a Jesuit priest to receive a blessing. The only indication of their fate is in the background of “Internal Improvements,” where a Native American mother and child “are expelled from their land by armed men.”²¹⁹ The scene might easily be overlooked in the surrounding activity and energy of the panel, and without any labels to draw attention to it in the Hall of Murals, as there were in the original arrangement, the Native Americans seem to quietly disappear from the narrative.

The absence from the Hall of Murals of “The Mound Builders” and “The Indians,” which portray indigenous peoples as the earliest inhabitants of Indiana, further limits the representation of Native American figures in the narrative, and it does not show the founding role of Native Americans in Indiana’s industry and culture. The forced removal of Native Americans from Indiana is relegated to the background, while the activities of westward expansion dominate the scene. In this way, the Hall of Murals presentation participates in what Buss calls “a creative redrawing of early lower Great Lakes geography and memory,” which presented the region as “an American place of progress” where Native Americans were portrayed as either “primitive peoples of the past or sad victims of the spirit of progress itself.”²²⁰

Collective memory of the pioneer era has shifted in recent years to include alternative narratives, including the history of Native Americans. Visitors today might question this absence of diverse narratives in the Hall of Murals. The introduction of new perspectives to the historical narrative, which would include Native American voices,

²¹⁹ Adams, *American Original*, 205.

²²⁰ Buss, *Winning the West*, 189.

would profoundly complicate the memories of pioneer heroism and the progress of westward expansion expressed in the Hall of Murals, but as Schudson asserts, “Sometimes [...] the past changes—and should change—with time.”²²¹

The two scenes on the north wall, “Colleges and City Life” and “Leisure and Literature,” depict scholarly activities (fig. 68). This is a fitting theme to be featured in the murals’ main location, and also the selection for the cover of *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals* (fig. 69), published by the University. In a forward to the book, Karen Hanson reiterates the valuable educational role of the murals at the university:

The murals provide an invaluable opportunity for renewed dialogue about our collective past and its relevance to issues in the present and future. The murals’ didactic function thus makes them more than simply beautiful enhancements to our campus; they are an integral part of our teaching mission as well.²²²

The figure dressed in academic regalia, a professor or a college graduate, is one of the large anchoring figures of the composition. The traditional academic dress, still worn in the present, prevents the figure from being assigned to a particular period of history and makes this image relatable to contemporary experience. While the theme of scholarship alone makes it an ideal image for the university’s display, the image also makes a direct reference to Indiana University. According to Foster, the scholarly figure is facing towards structures “suggesting the library and student building of Indiana University at Bloomington [...]” (fig. 70).²²³ Students familiar with the campus architecture might

²²¹ Schudson, “Distortion in Collective Memory,” 349.

²²² Karen Hanson, foreword to *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 3.

²²³ Kathleen A. Foster, “Cultural Panel 8: Leisure and Literature,” *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 68.

recognize the buildings. The inclusion of this panel in the Hall of Murals arrangement connects the mural to IU's Bloomington campus and reinforces the enduring educational purpose of the mural.

The University Theatre building, a structure located at the east end of the IU Auditorium, was selected to house four panels of Benton's murals (fig. 71). The University Theatre was constructed as a wing of the Auditorium in 1941 in order to house the university's expanding theatre program, and the mural panels were part of the original design (fig. 72). Because of its small size in contrast to the IU Auditorium—which had nearly ten times the seating—the building was sometimes called the “Little Theatre.”²²⁴ With the opening of the Lee Norvelle Theatre and Drama Center in 2002, the University Theatre was replaced as the principal theatrical performance venue on campus. Plans were made to renovate the University Theatre, and in 2011 the building was reopened as the Indiana University Cinema (fig. 73).²²⁵ The mural panels were restored and the interior was updated to complement the mural. The IU Cinema webpage says that the design, featuring 1930s architectural features and Benton's murals, “transports

²²⁴ Indiana University, “Indiana University Department of Theatre and Drama Records, 1925-2007, Bulk 1945-1975: A Guide to the Records at the Indiana University Archives,” Archives Online at Indiana University, 2010, Accessed September 10, 2015. http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/findingaids/view?doc.view=entire_text&docId=InU-Ar-VAC0946.

²²⁵ Indiana University, “Indiana University Department of Theatre and Drama Records, 1925-2007, Bulk 1945-1975: A Guide to the Records at the Indiana University Archives,” Archives Online at Indiana University, 2010, Accessed September 10, 2015. http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/findingaids/view?doc.view=entire_text&docId=InU-Ar-VAC0946.

moviegoers back to the heyday of cinema.”²²⁶ With the building’s inauguration, people had the opportunity to see the four panels of Benton’s murals after the building had been closed for years.²²⁷ At the front of the room on either side of the stage are the two panels that were located over the entrance at the fair: “The Mound Builders” and “The Indians” (figs. 74-75). At the back of the theater are the two final panels of the original sequence, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” and “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” (fig. 76). As with the Hall of Murals arrangement, compositional balance seems to drive the layout choice. The orientation of the two pairs is similar to their original exhibition. “The Indians” and “The Mound Builders” are shown on the same wall, with a stage/screen between them instead of the original introductory statement. “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” and “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” are located at the back of the theater, seen by theater-goers as they exit. Unlike the original mural presentation, in this location the panels are understood as two pairs rather than as part of a much larger narrative.

“Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” and “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” are each missing a section from the original display. Although they appear small in comparison to the rest of the panels, they were sizeable pieces—several feet tall. The missing panel sections were designed to fit over the exit in the Indiana pavilion exhibition space, framing the doorway. It is plausible that the two panel sections were removed in order to suit the design of the new space, which, unlike the original location, does not

²²⁶ Indiana University Bloomington, “About: Indiana University Cinema,” Accessed September 10, 2015. <http://www.cinema.indiana.edu/about>.

²²⁷ According to IU Cinema Director Jon Vickers, when the Cinema opened, “Most students on this campus [had] probably never been to the theater because it’s been closed for so long.” Brian Welk, “IU Cinema Debuts New Facility with State-of-the-Art Technology” *Indiana Daily Student*, Nov 10, 2010.

have a central exit doorway for the pieces to frame, but rather two side exits. The absent section of “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” portrays solutions to the Depression in politics and science, along with news headlines concerning unemployment, banking and taxes, and a large question mark of the unknown future (fig. 77).²²⁸ This scene was indicative of the moment at which the murals were created, and featured Indiana Governor Paul McNutt as a political force for change. Though some images of the Great Depression remain, like the “No Help Wanted” and “County Unemployment Relief Application” signs, the politics of the era and uncertainty of the future no longer dominate the final scene. In 1941 much of the Indiana life depicted was still relevant, and today, the Indianapolis 500 and Indiana’s basketball legacy are still easily recognizable (fig. 78). Indiana’s love of basketball, which has come to be known as “Hoosier Hysteria,” is represented by two players identified as members of Indianapolis’s Shortridge High School team in the early 1930s.²²⁹ However, in the new location, the jerseys evoke the crimson and cream of the IU basketball team. This panel also contains a self-portrait of Benton, holding his brush and palette and smoking a pipe as he watches the work of an architect modeled after Thomas Hibben, architect of the Indiana pavilion.²³⁰

The heroic figures in all four of the cinema panels make them fitting for a space of dramatic performances on stage, and later, in film. A previously discussed, in “Thomas

²²⁸ Kathleen A. Foster, “Cultural Panel 11: Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought,” *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 74.

²²⁹ Foster, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought,” 74.

²³⁰ Foster, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought,” 74.

Hart Benton and the Melodrama of Democracy,” Casey Nelson Blake argues that Benton’s murals were different from others of the time in that the scenes “were in fact melodramas.”²³¹ According to Blake, “Benton’s Indiana Murals trade deliberately on the representational motifs of theatrical and cinematic melodrama” and act as “a series of dramatically staged vignettes.”²³² This drama is evident in the panels chosen for the theater/cinema location. Two monumental Native American figures frame the stage with dynamic movement. One muscular figure reaches for an arrow during the hunt, and the other lifts his arms to the sky, mourning another who has fallen. The scenes at the back of the theater show the energy of 1930s life, with modern transportation, manufacturing, and limestone mining on one side; and basketball players, the Indianapolis 500, unemployed workers, and art/design professionals on the other. These panel pairs were matched across the hall in their original setting, Cultural scene 1 with Industrial scene 1, and Cultural scene 11 with Industrial scene 11. Because this relationship is preserved, Benton’s use of matching poses and symmetry is demonstrated in the cinema panels. The raised arm of the basketball player resembles that of the standing quarry worker, while the crouching architect with outstretched arm is matched in the position of the other quarry worker. At the front of the theater, the large figures’ sinewy bodies in “The Indians” and “The Mound Builders,” naked aside from their red waistcloths and footwear, mirror one another in three-quarter stance.

Today these scenes are understood in the context of the function of the building as a cinema—enhancing its “art house theater” design and celebrating film’s ability to

²³¹ Blake, “Melodrama of Democracy,” 172.

²³² Blake, “Melodrama of Democracy,” 175.

transport the audience to different times and places.²³³ When the theatre opened in 1941, viewers were presented with a juxtaposition of the prehistoric past and images of contemporary life. Now both pairs represent historical events beyond the personal experience of most viewers. For most visitors, the broader context of the panels is unknown, as there are no visible labels or explanatory texts in the location. The panels are a major design element in the room, and the absence of additional contextualization suggests that the intention is to impress visitors more than it is to educate them. Wells' placement of the panels in the theater was likely a strategic move as much as it was necessary due to space constraints in the Hall of Murals. It enhanced the atmosphere of the theater, gave the university's new acquisition more exposure, and secured the theater/cinema as a unique destination in IU's Fine Arts Plaza.

At Indiana University, Benton's murals no longer advance the message of progress and the usable past in a guided experience as they did at the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition. Changes in the panels' arrangement, orientation, and juxtaposition, the architecture and purpose of the display locations, viewers' temporal distance from the subject, and reduction in the number of explanatory texts along with changes in content, all alter the viewing experience of the Indiana Murals. Although viewers do not march through the state's progress from the prehistoric to the present day, the presentation of the murals at Indiana University retains Benton's notion of ordinary people as the makers of history. IU President Myles Brand calls the murals "a tribute to the unsung men and

²³³ Brian Welk, "IU Cinema Debuts New Facility with State-of-the-Art Technology" *Indiana Daily Student*, Nov 10, 2010.

women who are responsible for the growth of the state and of her institutions of higher learning,” in his introduction to *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*.²³⁴

Indiana University’s efforts to preserve the treasured murals include major restorations to the panels in the Auditorium in 1998, the Cinema in 2009, and Woodburn Hall in 2010. Benton’s Indiana Murals are a testament to the university’s impressive fine arts legacy. The murals have long been “must-visit” features of the Bloomington campus. While some images deemed offensive by 1933 viewers—including the mine worker throwing a rock at a guard, and the pioneer woman with large feet and clingy dress—no longer incite protest from viewers,²³⁵ one scene in Woodburn Hall has continued to spur discussion about how cultural memory functions in the perception of controversial imagery. “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press,” which is displayed with “Electric Power, Motor Cars, Steel” in Woodburn Hall room 100, has been a point of controversy at the university in recent years for its depiction of white-robed Ku Klux Klan members burning a cross (fig. 79). A study of the scene and its surrounding protest offers insight into why it continues to spark debate, while protests over other scenes have subsided.

²³⁴ Myles Brand, foreword to *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 1.

²³⁵ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 21.

CHAPTER 3

PARKS, THE CIRCUS, THE KLAN, THE PRESS

The tenth panel of the Industrial sequence, “Electric Power, Motor-Cars, Steel,” and the tenth panel of the Cultural sequence, “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press,” are installed across from one another in Woodburn 100, a lecture hall with a seating capacity of over four hundred, located a short distance away from the Indiana University Auditorium (fig. 80). The room was originally designated as an auditorium, but for years it has been used to hold large lecture classes. Wells felt that this room, part of the university’s new school of business in 1940, was a fitting location for “Electric Power, Motor-Cars, Steel,” which shows Indiana’s manufacturing and power industries.²³⁶ The building is now home to Indiana University’s department of political science. Situated on the wall next to each panel is a brief text that provides an overview of the Indiana history depicted and the locations of the other panels from the series.

“Electric Power, Motor-Cars, Steel” shows the development of northern Indiana into the state’s principal manufacturing district. Electricity, known as “white coal,” is represented with a white lightning bolt providing energy to Indiana’s growing centers of production.²³⁷ The dynamism of the composition is compelling, but the panel across the room, “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press,” has attracted the most attention from viewers since the murals’ installation at Indiana University. The panel contains several scenes of the state’s civic and social progression. The growth of the Indiana’s

²³⁶ Foster, “Indiana Murals,” 24-25.

²³⁷ Nanette Esseck Brewer, “Industrial Panel 10: Electric Power, Motor-Cars, Steel,” *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 50.

state park system since its founding in 1916 is signified with the planting of a tree. Entertainers perform in Peru, Indiana, the preferred winter quarters of several circuses, where animals were trained, equipment was mended, and the circus was readied for the next season.²³⁸ Indiana's improved fire department uses modern equipment to douse a flaming building. A nurse tends to patients in Indiana's hospital system. A printer, a journalist, and a photographer represent Indiana's Pulitzer Prize winning press.²³⁹ The Ku Klux Klan looms in the distance, indicating the Klan's powerful presence in Indiana during the 1920s. The image of the Klan rally and burning cross has been the subject of debate at Indiana University and the object of several student protests. While many undoubtedly find the very presence of the image offensive, it should not be assumed that Benton's incorporation of the Klan signifies approval. The Klan image and the controversy it has engendered are best understood in the context of the history of the Klan in Indiana and how historical constructions of the Klan play into contemporary understanding of this scene.

Historians recognize several major manifestations of the Ku Klux Klan. The most widely remembered movements are the Reconstruction-era Klan following the Civil War, and the Klan of the civil rights era in the 1950s and 1960s, both of which were concentrated in the southern states.²⁴⁰ Distinct from these phases is the Klan of the 1920s, when it operated with significant force in Midwestern states, notably in the stronghold of

²³⁸ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 47.

²³⁹ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 47.

²⁴⁰ Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 1.

Indiana, where Klan membership numbers were considerable.²⁴¹ This second Klan movement was initiated in Atlanta, Georgia in 1915 by William J. Simmons, who started it as a fraternal organization with little resemblance to the Reconstruction-era Klan before it, other than the use of the regalia and titles. In order to increase profits, Simmons formed a partnership with publicists Edward Young Clark and Elizabeth Tyler, who developed a new promotional strategy of white-supremacist nativism and radical social vigilance. The strategy was successful in recruiting members, and it quickly spread across the country.²⁴² The Klan's vigilante law enforcement included raids on speakeasies, gambling haunts, and brothels.²⁴³ A hierarchical leadership structure governed members at the regional, state, and local levels. State-level Klan chapters elected their officials and governed themselves for the most part, but the national headquarters in Atlanta maintained veto power.²⁴⁴ Internal disputes plagued the Klan, and at times disagreements lead to the formation of independent Klan groups.²⁴⁵ Klan chapters varied greatly in their

²⁴¹ Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 2.

²⁴² Southern Poverty Law Center, *Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence*, (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2011), 17.

²⁴³ David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), 165-166.

²⁴⁴ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 33-34.

²⁴⁵ This was the case in 1924, when Indiana's Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson became involved in a power struggle with the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Hiram Evans, and was replaced by an Atlanta-appointed Grand Dragon Walter Bossert. Stephenson retaliated by forming an independent Indiana Klan. Although the two Grand Dragons of Indiana briefly worked together to secure political victories for the Klan in the 1924 election, disputes between headquarters and the Indiana Klan were a constant source of tension. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 168-170.

activities and strategies, and recent scholarship tends to focus on regional and local Klans in consideration of these differences.²⁴⁶

The description of the Ku Klux Klan in David Laurance Chambers' 1933 mural guidebook offers insight into Indiana's attitude towards contemporaneous Klan activity:

The leaders were business men, bent on making money. They found it easy to do. They offered the lure of a secret society, of spectacular regalia, of a crusade to protect Cross and Flag, all for an initiation fee of ten dollars. [...] The Klan under [D. C. Stephenson's] manipulation became a political factor not to be trifled with. Voting almost as a bloc, it could be made to turn an election. It did little or no violence. It did not strike with "the lash, the tar brush and the torch." But commercially its membership was numerous enough to present an effective boycott against any merchant who failed to do it favor.²⁴⁷

The role of the Klan was downplayed by Indiana history texts and museums, which tended to ignore the Klan's presence in Indiana altogether or, like Chambers' description above, portrayed it as a small group of naïve, rural Hoosiers who fell prey to the exploitation of charismatic Klan leaders. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the Klan's tremendous popularity throughout the state in the 1920s was generally acknowledged.²⁴⁸ It is estimated that over a quarter of native-born white men in Indiana joined the Klan in the 1920s, as well as numerous women and youth.²⁴⁹ The Indiana Klan went beyond the singularly anti-black racism of its southern counterparts and instead cast

²⁴⁶ Allen Safianow, "The Klan Comes to Tipton," *Indiana Magazine of History* 95, no. 3 (1999), 204.

²⁴⁷ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 48.

²⁴⁸ James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 242-244.

²⁴⁹ Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 46-47. James Madison notes that this was the only period in Indiana history that the state had a Klan presence of this magnitude, and later Indiana Klan groups were small and largely ineffective; *Hoosiers*, 242.

its agenda in terms of social and political reform.²⁵⁰ The group's professed central tenets—Protestant Christianity and patriotism—appealed to a broad spectrum of white Indiana residents.²⁵¹ The Klan supported Prohibition and so-called “family values,” while breeding distrust for “all ‘outsiders’—Jews, Catholics, immigrants, and non-whites—as the source of America’s moral and financial problems.”²⁵² Catholics and Jews, and to a lesser degree, blacks, were seen as the primary threats to society. Although lynching, abductions, murder, and physical violence were rare in the northern states, the Klan effectively utilized “social and economic intimidation, boycotts, slanderous propaganda and rumor, awesome spectacles, vigilante patrols, and [...] the ballot box.”²⁵³ Historian Allen Safianow notes that “considerable evidence [suggests] that civic and social concerns” were significant in attracting members to Indiana’s Klan.²⁵⁴ However, the Klan’s rapid infiltration of the state was made possible by racist and nativist attitudes that already pervaded society, and the Klan deliberately “fed upon these racial, religious, and ethnic tensions.”²⁵⁵ Racism was undoubtedly an important part of the Klan’s agenda, and it found ample support in Indiana. The Klan was embraced in Indiana’s rural sundown

²⁵⁰ Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 2-3.

²⁵¹ Madison, *Hoosiers*, 244-245.

²⁵² Kathleen A. Foster, “Cultural Panel 10: Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press,” *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 72.

²⁵³ Richard K. Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross: The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1991), 5-6.

²⁵⁴ Allen Safianow, Review of *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* by Leonard J. Moore. *Indiana Magazine of History* 88, no. 3 (September 1992), 242.

²⁵⁵ Allen Safianow, “‘You Can’t Burn History’: Getting Right with the Klan in Noblesville, Indiana,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 100, no. 2 (June 2004), 115.

towns, which excluded blacks entirely, and threatened any black person who stayed past sundown.²⁵⁶ And in urban areas like Indianapolis, the Klan worked to pass legislature that would implement segregation in neighborhoods and schools.²⁵⁷

The Klan soon became involved in Indiana politics and was strongly associated with the Republican Party.²⁵⁸ Klan backing helped numerous politicians win the 1924 elections, including Indiana's Governor Ed Jackson, a good friend of charismatic Klan leader, D. C. Stephenson.²⁵⁹ These political victories led many to believe that Stephenson was, as he often claimed, "the law" in Indiana.²⁶⁰ But the Klan's victory was short-lived. When Stephenson raped and mutilated clerical worker Madge Oberholtzer, leading to a second-degree murder conviction in 1925, Klan membership in Indiana rapidly declined, as did other Klan outposts in the north.²⁶¹

Stephenson expected to receive a pardon from his friend, Governor Jackson, and when the pardon was not issued, Stephenson revealed the names of many Indiana politicians who had become embroiled in corrupt relations with the Klan, including

²⁵⁶ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 165.

²⁵⁷ Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 144-149.

²⁵⁸ Members of the Klan in northern and western states generally supported the Republican Party, while in southern states they generally leaned Democrat. However many Democrats were strongly anti-Klan, and the party voted against adopting an anti-Klan platform by a very narrow margin at the 1924 Democratic convention in New York. Southern Poverty Law Center, *Ku Klux Klan*, 22.

²⁵⁹ Madison, *Hoosiers*, 248.

²⁶⁰ Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 156.

²⁶¹ Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross*, 159.

bribery and illegal campaign donations.²⁶² These allegations and Stephenson's highly publicized trial lead to the demise of the Klan by the end of the decade.²⁶³ However, the racist attitudes of Indiana residents, which the Klan wholly supported, remained long after the Klan's departure.²⁶⁴

Benton's original inclusion of the scene in his mural was closely tied to the political leanings of the state and the "newly elected Democrats" who insisted the scene be included.²⁶⁵ The power of the Klan in Indiana politics was so great that the 1924 Indiana Republican Convention was likened to a Klan meeting, and Klansmen who were registered as Democrats voted for Klan-approved Republican candidates in the election. At the height of Klan power, most cities in Indiana were governed by Republicans. After the Klan's political corruption was exposed and numerous notable Indiana Republicans were jailed for their involvement, political currents shifted radically. The Republican Party's association with Klan corruption had tarnished its reputation, and Indiana's 1929 municipal elections brought an anti-Klan Democrat majority into control of the state.²⁶⁶ Benton's original inclusion of the scene in his mural was closely tied to the political leanings of the state. The Indiana Democrats' insistence that Benton include the Klan in his murals was almost certainly motivated by the chance to criticize the Republican Party for its relationship with the Klan, and to remind viewers of the embarrassment it had

²⁶² Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross*, 162-165.

²⁶³ Madison, *Hoosiers*, 253.

²⁶⁴ Safianow, "You Can't Burn History," 141-142.

²⁶⁵ Benton, *An Artist in America*, 253.

²⁶⁶ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 170-174

caused. However, recent audiences have largely forgotten the political repercussions of the Klan's corrupt business practices in the 1920s.

The image of the Klan rally was the most controversial Benton scene for viewers in 1933, who would rather not have been reminded of the state's shameful ties with the Klan's political corruption, racism, and intimidation. Indiana's embarrassment was still fresh, but the description accompanying the scene at the fair indicated that Indiana wanted to show it had moved on: "Her sister states scoffed at Indiana. Take notice, sisters, that Indiana put her house in order."²⁶⁷ The composition reinforces this statement, as the majority of the scenes in the panel show "everyday heroics," including a nurse, firefighters, the press, and forest preservation. This evidence of the state's social progress contrasts with the sinister Klan rally relegated to the background.²⁶⁸

The hospital scene may appear ordinary to present-day viewers, but it would have been shocking for visitors to the fair in 1933, at which time there was an "expectation of segregation" in hospitals.²⁶⁹ This representation is the result of Benton's visit to Indianapolis City Hospital, during his tour of the state.²⁷⁰ At the time, it was the "only viable hospital in the city that accepted black patients."²⁷¹ Even when the murals were installed at Indiana University, the image would have seemed out of the ordinary,

²⁶⁷ Chambers, *Indiana: A Hoosier History*, 42.

²⁶⁸ Justin Wolff, *Thomas Hart Benton: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012), 230-231.

²⁶⁹ Kathi Badertscher, "A New Wishard is on the Way," *Indiana Magazine of History* 108, no. 4 (December 2012), 366.

²⁷⁰ Foster, "Cultural Panel 10," 72.

²⁷¹ Badertscher, "A New Wishard is on the Way," 365.

because it was not until the 1950s that other hospitals in the region started to admit black patients.²⁷² When Benton made his initial sketch at the hospital, his assistant is reported to have said that Benton “wants to make a strong statement *for* tolerance and *against* bigotry.”²⁷³

The position of the Klan rally right above the nurse and child links the two vignettes. The visual similarity between the nurse’s white uniform and cap and the white robes of the Klansmen behind her reinforces this relationship, and further emphasizes the figures’ opposing actions—the Klansmen burning a cross to provoke fear and the nurse reaching out to provide care equally to black and white patients. The church rising up beside the Klan rally has been described as a reference to the Klan’s foundation in Protestant Christianity.²⁷⁴ Brewer offers an alternative interpretation, given that it has been identified as a Roman Catholic church in Peru, Indiana. She proposes that the church’s inclusion signifies the Klan’s harassment of Catholic immigrants in the 1920s.²⁷⁵ In 1933, viewers would have understood the presence of the press in the foreground of this panel as related to the awarding a few years earlier of the Pulitzer Prize

²⁷² Badertscher, “A New Wishard is on the Way,” 369.

²⁷³ Philip B. Reed, letter to the editor, “Indiana Alumni Magazine (March-April, 1991), 3-4, quoted in Foster, “Cultural Panel 10,” *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals*, 79.

²⁷⁴ Foster, “Cultural Panel 10,” 72.

²⁷⁵ Brewer, “Hoosier Historian,” 158.

for Meritorious Public Service to the *Indianapolis Times* for its vital role in revealing the Klan's corrupt involvement in Indiana politics.²⁷⁶

Thus Benton's choice to include the Klan does not indicate approval, and the anti-Klan intent of the mural is much less apparent to those who have viewed the murals after the 1930s. Benton's message in "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press" was tailored to the experiences of his 1930s audience. The message has become obscured by the separation of the panel from the majority of the series, and by viewers' temporal distance from the events depicted. Perception of the Ku Klux Klan has shifted over time. Contemporary memories of the Klan are shaped by events that transpired during the Klan's revival in the civil rights era and afterward.

"More than one thousand documented cases of racist terrorism, assaults, and murders [were] committed by Klansmen and their allies" between the years of 1956 and 1966 alone.²⁷⁷ The violence of the civil rights-era Klan harkened back to the Klan's first appearance in the post-Civil War south, where it "exiled, flogged, mutilated, shot, stabbed, and hanged" in opposition to Reconstruction efforts.²⁷⁸ The Klan's bloody revival continued until the mid-1960s, when FBI infiltration of the Klan's upper ranks

²⁷⁶ Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross*, 170. In 1926 the *Indianapolis Times* began publishing the series of articles "What Stephenson Could Tell," covering Klan-related political corruption in Indiana, both state and local, including unreported campaign contributions and misuse of campaign funds, bribes to secure Klan-recommended appointments to various government boards and agencies, and numerous other instances of fraud and embezzlement. Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross*, 161-170.

²⁷⁷ Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross*, 187.

²⁷⁸ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 10.

significantly diminished Klan activity.²⁷⁹ The years following the civil rights movement saw an increased number of new white supremacist groups.²⁸⁰ The Ku Klux Klan experienced surges in membership at different times in the last few decades, but with no national leadership, it has fragmented into many conflicting factions.²⁸¹ The Klan progressively became associated with numerous other violent white supremacist organizations, which, despite different titles and methods, “were inevitably fixed in the public mind as branches of the Ku Klux Klan.”²⁸²

The image of a Klan member dressed in white robes and hood remains “one of the most vivid and frightening in American history.”²⁸³ It is inextricably entwined in American memory with Reconstruction and civil rights era violence, when the group operated as “the most radical and dangerous bigots in American society.”²⁸⁴ Despite the Klan’s reduced power, threats of violence persist, and the Klan has come to symbolize the abuse and discrimination of the past, as well as the future struggles facing black Americans.²⁸⁵

It is no surprise then that the presence of this charged imagery in an Indiana University classroom offended students and prompted numerous complaints over the

²⁷⁹ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 432-434.

²⁸⁰ Southern Poverty Law Center, *Ku Klux Klan*, 40.

²⁸¹ Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross*, 192-194.

²⁸² Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross*, 193.

²⁸³ Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 1.

²⁸⁴ Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 1.

²⁸⁵ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 434.

years. The isolation of the panel from the rest of the sequence emphasizes the imagery in “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” in a different manner than its presentation in 1933. The placement of the panel much closer to the floor in Woodburn 100, just above students’ heads, also causes the Klan to appear larger than when the panel was situated ten feet off the ground at the fair and surrounded by other scenes (fig. 81). At the University, this lack of a broader narrative and visual context and the initial absence of didactic text (which had been part of its exhibition at the fair) have shaped viewers’ understanding of the panel. The message of Indiana’s social progress was not immediately evident to many students (and others), and the scene has been perceived at times as a glorification of the Klan and its activities. It was not until 1986 that placards explaining the original context and history of the panels were added in Woodburn 100, only after several black students met with Indiana University’s president to express concerns about the mural panel.²⁸⁶ These texts explained subtleties specific to the experiences of the original viewers, which are far removed from the common historical associations of modern audiences.

The use of Woodburn 100 as a classroom is significant because students are required to attend class where this Klan image cannot be avoided. Unlike visitors to the Indiana pavilion, students cannot choose to steer clear of the mural. In 1989 members the university’s Black Student Union (BSU) expressed opposition to the mural’s presence in a classroom because it was “spark[ing] racist attitudes,” despite the expository wall

²⁸⁶ “Cross Burning Mural Incites More Controversy,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 8, 1989, 7A.

label.²⁸⁷ This prompted discussion about relocating the panel to the Indiana University Art Museum or Indiana Memorial Union, which students felt would be more suitable given the mural's sensitive content. An eleven-person task force investigated possible solutions, concluding that the most appropriate response was not to relocate the panel, an expensive option that could seriously damage the painting, but to provide more educational framing for the murals.²⁸⁸ The plan included a brochure, a presentation at the beginning of each semester for classes held in the room, a brief video on the mural's history and message, and a workshop on dealing with racism for African-American students.²⁸⁹

Nonetheless, the piece continued to stir controversy. Perhaps the most heated protests arose in February of 2002, by which time most professors who taught in Woodburn 100 no longer consistently dedicated time at the beginning of the semester to a presentation on the mural and its history, including showing the video about the mural.²⁹⁰ As a part of Black History Month programming, Indiana University's Black Student Union held a presentation and discussion in Woodburn Hall, which dealt with Benton's

²⁸⁷ "Cross Burning Mural Incites More Controversy," *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 8, 1989, 7A.

²⁸⁸ Teri Klassen, "KKK Mural Recommendation is Near," *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), March 27, 1990.

²⁸⁹ Teri Klassen, "Mural with KKK Figures to Stay in Classroom," *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), March 29, 1990.

²⁹⁰ George Lyle IV, "Campus Art Unsettles," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), February 13, 2002.

mural, as well as other issues on campus.²⁹¹ The BSU's program was part of a "plan to promote dialogue on the mural."²⁹² An intense discussion followed, with a panel of representatives from the IU Office of the Chancellor, the Racial Incidents Team (based in the Division of Student Affairs), and the Afro-American Studies department.²⁹³ The majority of students in attendance were unaware of the video about the mural.²⁹⁴ Indiana University's student newspaper, the *Indiana Daily Student*, reported: "The primary grievance for the group is not that the painting is exhibited, but that it is currently exhibited out of context and in an improper place."²⁹⁵ After hearing multiple complaints about the mural, the leaders of the Black Student Union at Indiana University launched a protest, suggesting that it be moved to the Indiana University Art Museum, or that the image be covered up during classes.²⁹⁶

The image held great potential to offend, given all that the Klan symbolized, but as Richard Howells maintains in his essay "Controversy, Art, and Power," "controversies

²⁹¹ Allison Stroud, "Activist Speaks; Programs Held," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), February 12, 2002.

²⁹² Alex Hickey, "Complaints Filed by BSU About Mural," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), March 5, 2002.

²⁹³ George Lyle IV, "Campus Art Unsettles," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), February 13, 2002. The current name of the department is African American and African Diaspora Studies.

²⁹⁴ George Lyle IV, "Campus Art Unsettles," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), February 13, 2002.

²⁹⁵ Alex Hickey, "Complaints Filed by BSU About Mural," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), March 5, 2002.

²⁹⁶ Barb Berggoetz, "Students Pressing IU to Remove Mural That Includes Klan," *Indianapolis Star*, March 9, 2002, B1.

in the arts need to be understood not as aesthetically sealed but as the dramatization of greater social, political, and cultural interests in dispute.²⁹⁷ The conditions and events in viewers' recent memory aggravated the already volatile situation, ultimately prompting students to react against the offending image. In 1995, citizens of Indiana were reminded of the Klan's once powerful hold on their state when membership records were discovered in a barn among other Klan paraphernalia from the 1920s in Noblesville, Indiana.²⁹⁸ The findings forced the town to confront its past Klan involvement and face the reality that "its most respected citizens, its esteemed forefathers, embraced an organization which now is commonly regarded as an anathema."²⁹⁹ A barrage of media attention followed the discovery, and the story made national news.³⁰⁰ By this time, the image of the Klan was associated in people's minds with the spectrum of white supremacist groups. The event was also a reminder that the Ku Klux Klan and related groups were still active in the state, some with members at Indiana University. The Noblesville discovery dredged up memories of past fear and violence, and the possibility for future attack.

The image in the mural of the Klan rally stimulated anxieties about the genuine threat of violence from white supremacist groups. On July 4th, 1999, (only two and a half years before the 2002 mural controversy), Benjamin Smith, a former Indiana University

²⁹⁷ Richard Howells, "Controversy, Art, and Power," in Richard Howells, Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, and Judith Schachter, *Outrage: Art, Controversy, and Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 43.

²⁹⁸ Safianow, "You Can't Burn History," 109.

²⁹⁹ Safianow, "You Can't Burn History," 112.

³⁰⁰ Safianow, "You Can't Burn History," 110.

student and member of the white-supremacist group, World Church of the Creator, went on a killing spree across Illinois and Indiana.³⁰¹ Among Smith's victims was Won-Joon Yoon, a Korean graduate student at Indiana University, who Smith shot and killed.³⁰² During his time as a student at Indiana University, Smith was known for distributing racist pamphlets and contributing to the *Indiana Daily Student* opinion pages.³⁰³ The tragic reality of this hate crime and the potential for future violence were still fresh in the minds of Indiana University students, who were concerned that a lack of university support for minority students fostered an increasingly hostile environment on campus. The BSU pointed to the example of Auburn University fraternity students' blackface lynching costume in 2001 and worried that "readily available racist influences on the walls" at Indiana University could instigate comparable incidents.³⁰⁴ Circumstances like these exacerbated fears that this Klan image in a University classroom was inflammatory, and students reacted in protest.

On March 4th, 2002, more than twenty-five students walked together from the Indiana Memorial Union to the Student Ethics and Harassment Programs building and filed complaints with the Racial Incidents Team about "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the

³⁰¹ John Kelly, "Smith Was Well-Known Racist at IU," *Herald-Times*, (Bloomington, IN), July 4, 1999.

³⁰² "Suspect in Racial Shootings Had a Troubled Past," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 16, 1999, A8.

³⁰³ "Suspect in Shooting Spree Well Known in Indiana College Town," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, July 5, 1999, 3A.

³⁰⁴ George Lyle IV, "Campus Art Unsettles," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), February 13, 2002.

Press.”³⁰⁵ At a meeting, over sixty students and administrators discussed the future of the mural panel, and Indiana University Chancellor Sharon Brehm announced that she would make a decision by March 25th.³⁰⁶

The BSU’s protest garnered media attention. In the weeks leading up to the decision, a number of news outlets weighed in on the mural and its fate. The *Indiana Daily Student* provided detailed coverage as events unfolded on campus. Media attention played a significant role in driving the controversy. As Howells points out, “The arts do not take place in an aesthetic vacuum. They are located within society as a whole. Therefore, to spark fully fledged controversies, they have to pass from the relatively self-contained world of art and into the heavily contested public sphere.”³⁰⁷ The location of Benton’s “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” in a university classroom gave it a broader and more “captive” audience, amplifying its opportunity to cause upset. Wider press involvement quickly moved the controversy onto a larger public platform, providing national engagement. Stories included the views of students, professors, and administrators on the mural’s role at the university and whether it should remain in the classroom. The Bloomington *Herald Times* featured opinions of community members in its “Hot Topic” segment on the mural, and several papers published editorials in favor of the mural staying in place, including the *Indianapolis Star*. The *Star* explained its official stance on the issue: “Administrators should deny [students’] request [to move the mural].

³⁰⁵ Alex Hickey, “Complaints Filed by BSU About Mural,” *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), March 5, 2002.

³⁰⁶ Barb Berggoetz, “Students Pressing IU to Remove Mural That Includes Klan,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 9, 2002, B1.

³⁰⁷ Howells, “Controversy, Art, and Power,” 19.

A university is the last place where history and art should be censored because uncomfortable truths are exposed.”³⁰⁸

Some articles neglected to include a description or picture of the entire mural, highlighting and decontextualizing the potentially offensive Klan segment by divorcing it from other parts of the panel. One article in the Bloomington *Herald-Times* described “a mural depicting Indiana’s Klan history” that “includes a depiction of a Klan rally next to a church, complete with burning cross and waving American flag.”³⁰⁹ The panel’s other vignettes did not receive mention until halfway through the article. As the controversy developed, many publications referred to the panel as “the Klan mural.” While many articles accurately described the Klan scene in the mural, the intense concentration on this part of the panel sometimes resulted in reader confusion. More than one person who had never seen the mural believed it to be a twelve-foot tall painting of a Klan cross-burning. One reader expressed frustration with the paper’s inconsistency: “The first time it was shown in the paper [...] It was so small. It’s been shown twice since then and the camera is so close to the KKK that it is enormous and looks like it takes up the whole wall.”³¹⁰ Heated opinion pieces and letters to the editor continued to draw readers into the debate.

As promised, Chancellor Brehm announced her decision on March 25th. In a public statement, Brehm explained her choice to keep the mural in place in Woodburn

³⁰⁸ “Mural Can Remind Us of Shameful Past,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 17, 2002, D2.

³⁰⁹ John Meunier, “Students, IU Seek Solution for Mural,” *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), Feb 21, 2002.

³¹⁰ S. Murphy, “Unbelievable,” Letters to the Editor, *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), March 20, 2002.

100 and proposed a solution to “revise and refashion the educational program addressing the mural,” in conjunction with the BSU.³¹¹ The program Brehm outlined was similar to the one designed in 1990. It included the production of a new video, an educational brochure and email, and a mandatory class discussion about the mural at the beginning of each semester. Brehm also suggested that the plaque next to the mural include more information and that an additional plaque should be installed outside the classroom door. The second part of Brehm’s solution sought to address the larger issue of diversity on campus by allocating funds towards initiatives that promoted diversity. The One for Diversity Fund was established to commission and exhibit art that “will celebrate, recognize and memorialize the multicultural past and present of both Indiana and Indiana University.” At the time of the announcement, Brehm had secured \$12,000 to start the fund. In an effort support a “stronger commitment to diversity on this campus, and increase diversity among our faculty, staff and students,” Brehm promised to designate \$800,000 annually for four years to the Strategic Hiring Initiative to increase the number of minority and women faculty, and \$450,000 annually, also for the next four years, to “enhance retention among [...] minority and first generation college students.”³¹² A State of Diversity Address, to be given each fall, would evaluate the success of these efforts.

Following Chancellor Brehm’s statement, the BSU organized a meeting to talk about the decision. Students had mixed responses to Brehm’s proposal. Some were pleased with the Chancellor’s commitment to campus diversity and surprised by the

³¹¹ Sharon Brehm, “Statement from Chancellor Brehm on Benton Mural,” *IU Newsroom*, Indiana University, March 25, 2002, <http://newsinfo.iu.edu/news-archive/296.html>.

³¹² Brehm, “Statement.”

extent of Brehm's efforts.³¹³ Others were disappointed that the mural would remain in the classroom. One student criticized the plan saying, "We know the history. We don't have to relive it. It's just like a spit in the face."³¹⁴ BSU members agreed that they would need to be vigilant in ensuring that the university followed through on its promises.³¹⁵

Brehm's decision brought about another burst of news coverage, with headlines such as "Klan Mural to Stay at IU," and editorials supporting or opposing the decision. Most publications ultimately favored the mural remaining in its place, and the university did its best to counter negative press. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* published a brief but scathing report in its "Sense and Censorship" feature, which began, "The Ku Klux Klan still has a presence at Indiana University at Bloomington, and that's OK with the chancellor."³¹⁶ The highly critical article went so far as to include a statement of support from an officer in the American Knights of the KKK. In a letter responding to the article, the Indiana University Faculty Council Agenda Committee called the report "a disservice to the university and to [the *Chronicle's*] readers," and chastised the publication for its dishonesty in implying that Indiana University was in agreement with

³¹³ John Meunier, "Brehm: Murals will remain in Woodburn," *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), March 25, 2002.

³¹⁴ Barb Berggoetz, "IU Officials Say Ku Klux Klan Mural Will Stay," *Indianapolis Star*, March 26, 2002, C1.

³¹⁵ George Lyle IV, "Mural to Stay Put," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), July 25, 2002.

³¹⁶ Richard Morgan, "Sense and Censorship," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 12, 2002, A6.

the Klan.³¹⁷ The *Chronicle* published the response in the following month's "Letters to the Editor" segment, but the article surely damaged the university's reputation.

The mural's presence in an educational institution brings to light the tension between the university's objectives and its responsibility towards its students. Howells explains, "Controversies in the arts are rarely only about the arts. Works of art are not inherently controversial. What we see at work is more typically a power dynamic being played out by interested parties."³¹⁸ The university must consider its reputation and profile when it comes to the attitudes toward minority groups, student organizations, and the larger issue of diversity. However, as a place for free exchange of ideas and critical debate, the classroom might be the ideal setting for such tough discussions. Brehm made it clear in her statement that she felt it was necessary to honor both the university's "commitment to diversity" and its "commitment to freedom of expression," pointing out Benton's unwavering dedication to addressing both these issues in his work.³¹⁹

As one of the most valuable works of art at Indiana University, and an important part of the university's history, the school did not wish to risk damaging or censoring the panel. The university had recently completed a six-month, half-million dollar conservation of the panels in the University Auditorium in 1998. The massive project received funds from the Indiana University Foundation, private donors, and conservation

³¹⁷ Julie Bobay, Dan Drew, Bob Eno, Ann Gellis, Laura Ginger, and Sarita Soni. "Letters to the Editor: Controversial Mural at Indiana U," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 24, 2002, B16.

³¹⁸ Howells, "Controversy, Art, and Power," 19.

³¹⁹ Brehm, "Statement."

grants from the Getty Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.³²⁰ Risking damage to the panel by moving it would contradict the university's dedication to preserving the murals, and censoring the panel would conflict with the university's responsibility to support freedom of artistic expression.³²¹ However, student concerns about a hostile environment if the mural remained in the classroom would also harm the university's reputation. The university's response attempted to satisfy those who objected to the mural in a way that did not require relocating the panel.

The BSU acted according to its own set of objectives. Protest against the mural was a key component of the BSU's larger mission, which involved advocating for more diversity in the university faculty and student population, and securing more funds and hosting events for black groups on campus. The BSU argued that even though the mural depicts an important part of Indiana history, it promotes racist attitudes and has no place in the classroom.³²² BSU president Marshawn Wolley wrote an article for the *Indiana Daily Student* explaining the reasons for the BSU's protest of the mural. He confirmed

³²⁰ Contompasis, "Physical History," 115.

³²¹ However, panels from the Benton murals have been moved successfully. In 2009, the panels in the University Theatre building were moved to the IU Art Museum's painting conservation laboratory for restoration while the Theatre building underwent renovations to become the IU Cinema. Prior to the move, conservators from the Indianapolis Museum of Art were hired to stabilize flaking paint in order to minimize damage. The issue of relocating "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press" may have more to do with the logistics of removing the panels from Woodburn Hall than with the risk of damage, as conservator Margaret Contompasis explained it would be necessary to "remove part of the building to get [the Woodburn panels] out." The Woodburn panels remained in Woodburn 100 when they were restored in 2010. Nicole Brooks, "Historic Benton Murals Being Restored," *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), August 9, 2009.

³²² "IU Students Press for Removing Mural Depicting Klan Rally Work is by Famous Artist Benton," *Journal-Gazette* (Fort Wayne, IN), March 10, 2002, 4C.

that the goal of the protest was “to promote discussion on the nature of IU’s commitment to diversity.”³²³ Wolley raised the question: “With pictures of the Klan in a classroom, [...] and a lack of diversity throughout all facets of the University, can anyone wonder why prospective minority students are concerned about attending IU?”³²⁴ Carolyn Randolph, political action vice chair of the BSU, explained the campaign against the mural: “We need a small victory, or a victory that is tangible for students to see.”³²⁵ After the mural decision, political action chair Shannon Walden added, “We used the mural as a small starting point to excite people and to make sure they understand the lack of diversity on campus. I think we did that.”³²⁶

In her response to the protest, Brehm made an extensive effort to involve the BSU in the new programs. This showed students that the university acknowledged their concerns and wanted students’ input in addressing them. At the beginning of her statement Brehm thanked the members of the BSU “who have so eloquently expressed their concerns in our meetings.” Brehm commended the students for drawing attention to an important campus issue, and Brehm’s proposed initiatives appear to respond directly to the BSU’s main point of contention, the university’s lack of support for minorities. Brehm sought the BSU’s collaboration in each step of the solution, including the

³²³ Marshawn Wolley, “Murals Still Insulting as Ever,” *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), March 21, 2002.

³²⁴ Marshawn Wolley, “Murals Still Insulting as Ever,” *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), March 21, 2002.

³²⁵ Barb Berggoetz, “Students Pressing IU to Remove Mural That Includes Klan,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 9, 2002, B1.

³²⁶ Barb Berggoetz, “IU Officials Say Ku Klux Klan Mural Will Stay,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 26, 2002, C1.

production of the video and educational materials, and the appointment of co-chairs for the committee of the One for Diversity Fund. Although Brehm argued that it was essential that the mural remain in place in Woodburn 100, her commitment, backed by resources for new multicultural art and a more diverse faculty and student body, seemed to satisfy the BSU. Wolley said the group was happy with the chancellor's plans to promote diversity, but "as long as the mural is in the classroom, we will never be satisfied."³²⁷

Despite the BSU's stated resolve to continue pursuing the issue, most students seemed to accept the university's solution. The BSU took no further action and, without the constant fuel of the press, the controversy died down within a few months. Charlie Nelms, Vice President for Student Development and Diversity at Indiana University, was optimistic about the future of the panel: "When Indiana University becomes a truly diverse place, the Benton mural will no longer be a distraction, but instead will be one component of a campus that is enveloped in diversity."³²⁸ Nelms commended the BSU's desire for increased conversation about race and diversity on campus, and cited the resulting initiatives as evidence of their success.³²⁹

The mural received some news attention in 2003 as the one-year anniversary of the mural decision approached and Chancellor Brehm gave the annual state of diversity address. The address, originally intended to be held in the fall semester, was postponed to

³²⁷ Nick Riddle, "Black Students Protest Benton Mural," *ArtNews*, May 2002, 56.

³²⁸ Charlie Nelms, "Expression, Diversity at Core of Mural Issue," *South Bend Tribune*, April, 2, 2002.

³²⁹ Charlie Nelms, "Expression, Diversity at Core of Mural Issue," *South Bend Tribune*, April, 2, 2002.

allow time for more research.³³⁰ Brehm's talk focused on statistical trends in campus diversity over the past decade. The data indicated that the University fell behind in recruiting minority students, but retention of minority students had increased. Brehm believed that the statistics showed positive developments, but she stressed that "we must not reduce our efforts."³³¹ Gerald Mitchell, BSU President, was not as enthusiastic about the university's efforts, stating that that the One For Diversity initiative for multicultural art on campus was a poor use of funds, which he believed should be concentrated on increasing retention rates.³³² Following the speech, the IU Coalition of Black Student Organizations and Programs expressed their dissatisfaction with campus diversity and distributed a list of issues.³³³ Randolph stated, "the term 'diversity' has become a cliché on this campus."³³⁴ Brehm agreed to meet with the students to discuss their concerns.³³⁵ The BSU remained disappointed with the university's actions in regard to the mural

³³⁰ Adam Aasen, "Brehm to Give Diversity Update" *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), March 11, 2003.

³³¹ Steve Hinnefeld, "Brehm Cites Strides in IU's Diversity, Says Campus Can Do More" *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), March 12, 2003.

³³² Cathy Kightlinger, "IU Sees Progress Towards Diversity: Chancellor Says There's More Work to Do; Some Critics Question University's Priorities," *Indianapolis Star*, March 12, 2003, B1.

³³³ Adam Aasen and Alyson Brodsy, "Brehm Addresses Diversity" *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), March 12, 2003.

³³⁴ Cathy Kightlinger, "IU Sees Progress Towards Diversity: Chancellor Says There's More Work to Do; Some Critics Question University's Priorities," *Indianapolis Star*, March 12, 2003, B1.

³³⁵ Cathy Kightlinger, "IU Sees Progress Towards Diversity: Chancellor Says There's More Work to Do; Some Critics Question University's Priorities," *Indianapolis Star*, March 12, 2003, B1.

controversy, and although the topic made occasional appearances in the *Indiana Daily Student*, the BSU did not organize any notable protests against the mural.

The mural dispute was briefly renewed in 2005, following a visit by 2004 presidential candidate Reverend Al Sharpton, who gave a lecture at the Indiana University Auditorium. A student raised the issue of the mural during a question and answer session following Sharpton's speech. After walking to Woodburn Hall to see the offending panel, Sharpton pledged that he would do whatever he could to have the mural removed from the classroom and placed in a museum, asserting that the suffering he and others were subjected to during the struggle for civil rights "was not art. That was fact."³³⁶ The involvement of a well-known public figure in the issue briefly renewed media interest, and Indiana University President Adam Herbert made the following statement regarding the mural's place in the classroom: "As a black man who lived through the segregated realities of the South, I think it is important that there be a reminder of what we had to live through: the pain, the suffering, the fear."³³⁷ Although Sharpton and Herbert's responses were both based on their experiences of oppression, they came to opposite conclusions. Herbert argued that that mural should remain in the classroom. He stressed that students need to remember the wrongs of the past, and he likened the mural to the Jewish community's dedication to establishing Holocaust

³³⁶ Michael Zennie, "Sharpton Views Benton Mural," *Indiana Daily Student* (Bloomington, IN), May 12, 2005.

³³⁷ "Editorial: Don't Move Mural," *Journal Gazette* (Fort Wayne, IN), May 14, 2005, 8A.

museums to ensure that its past was not forgotten.³³⁸

During the 2002 controversy, the importance of “memorializing” a shameful history was a principal reason cited to keep the mural in the classroom. In its statement on the mural issue, the *Indianapolis Star* contended, “A university is the last place where history and art should be censored because uncomfortable truths are exposed. [...] It’s an ugly history, painful for people of all races today. But it’s a part of Indiana’s past that must never be forgotten.”³³⁹ These assertions suggest that despite significant passage of time since its creation, the panel still challenges viewers to consider the “usable past.” The symbolism of the Klan image in the mural may have expanded in viewers’ memories to include later Klan revivals and other white supremacist groups, but the value of remembering difficult historical truths stands as a lasting message of the mural. Benton’s inclusion of the Klan functioned as a foil and as a warning against the threat the Klan might pose to the “just civic sphere” depicted in the other scenes of the panel.³⁴⁰ In his autobiography, Benton was critical of the Klan’s role in the violence and unrest following the first world war, stating: “The Ku Klux Klan with its anti-Negro, anti-Jew, and anti-Catholic platform stalked, white-robed and sinister, over the land.”³⁴¹ Not all are satisfied by the university’s educational approach as an acceptable solution to the issue. The very presence of the image in the classroom remains offensive to some, regardless of the

³³⁸ “IU President Says Controversial Mural Should Remain in Classroom,” *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, IN), May 12, 2005.

³³⁹ “Mural Can Remind Us of Shameful Past,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 17, 2002, D2.

³⁴⁰ Doss, “Action, Agency, Affect,” 135.

³⁴¹ Benton, *An American in Art*, 158.

artist's original intention.

Indiana University has been diligent in continuing its educational efforts regarding the mural since the 2002 controversy. The university appears to have adopted a preemptive strategy to deal with potential concerns about the panel. After “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” underwent conservation in 2010, the campus Commission on Multicultural Understanding installed an educational display outside Woodburn 100 (fig. 82). Included in the display's content is a miniature panorama of Benton's entire Indiana mural sequence and a segment devoted to the Woodburn 100 controversy.³⁴² While there have been no significant protests of “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” in recent years, the potential for conflict remains, and future circumstances could establish an environment ripe for another dispute in the coming years.

³⁴² “Display at IU's Woodburn Hall to Inform Students, Public About Benton Murals,” *IU Newsroom*, Indiana University, February 15, 2011. <http://newsinfo.iu.edu/news-archive/17398.html>

CONCLUSION

From their unveiling at the Century of Progress exposition in 1933, to their current home at Indiana University, Thomas Hart Benton's Indiana murals have not failed to leave an impression on those who see them. The relocation of the murals to IU and the resultant restructuring of their historical narrative have altered perceptions of their imagery and attributed new meanings to the historical scenes Benton depicted. While most scholarship has focused on the original message and context of the Indiana murals, the murals' nearly seventy-five year display at IU necessitates a more thorough analysis of the murals at the university, with specific attention to the contextual changes since the time of the fair.

The Indiana murals were tailored for a Depression-era audience to align with the fair's message of progress. The circumstances from which viewers approached the murals at the fair are foreign to most of today's viewers over eighty years later. The understood significance of the events contemporary to the 1933 audience, as well as the more distant historical scenes, has shifted with time. Perception of the murals has changed alongside developments in historiography, and viewers have started to question the lack of diverse perspectives in the narrative of progress and westward expansion. The message of a usable past—that the spirit of progress and perseverance found in Indiana's hard-working ancestors would bring viewers through the Depression and into a better future—was further obscured by changes in the scenes' order and separation into different buildings. In their arrangement at IU, the murals no longer accomplish their original purpose of guiding viewers chronologically through the progress of history and into the future.

The ways in which viewer reception of the murals is shaped by contextual shifts and developments in collective memory is especially apparent in the controversy over “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” in Woodburn Hall. The details of the controversy as it developed from the late 1980s and eventually led to the 2002 protest, reveal that the placement of the panel in a classroom, separate from the majority of the series, and changes in collective memory of the Ku Klux Klan acted as catalysts in the Black Student Union’s decision to protest the work’s current location. This case study benefits other studies of art controversies in educational institutions by demonstrating the function of collective memory in viewers’ reception of potentially controversial art. The attention the protest drew to “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” has made the panel famous as a standalone work, and it has prompted more educational efforts concerning the specific events this mural depicts than any other panel in the mural cycle.

In his autobiography, Benton acknowledged the realities of living in a rapidly changing society: “Today the meanings of people in one generation are often barely comprehensible to those of the next, because the situations which produced them have changed so radically.”³⁴³ Benton’s observations hold true in the case of the Indiana murals. However, Benton also recognized the ability of historical art to act as a “regenerative force,” capable of resurrecting “forgotten meanings.”³⁴⁴ The murals have allowed for a better understanding of the historical moment for which they were made, and in their situation at IU they facilitate the formation of new and relevant meanings for viewers in the present. The arrangement at the university also emphasizes different

³⁴³ Benton, *An American in Art*, 50.

³⁴⁴ Benton, *An American in Art*, 51.

scenes and invites new comparisons between panels. The findings in this paper can be considered a starting point for further analysis and discussion of the murals with attention to their location and presentation at IU. There is opportunity for a more thorough comparison of the formal arrangements at the two locations, as well as for the various new thematic relationships implied by the visual parallelism in the arrangement at IU.

While still inspiring viewers with their depiction of ordinary people as history makers and nation-builders, the murals also now remind people of IU's commitment to its artistic heritage. The murals provide opportunities for education about the history of the state and the university. In particular, the murals have become integrated into the history of IU as part of the legacy of one of the university's most influential and esteemed presidents, Herman B Wells. Credited with bringing the murals to IU's Bloomington campus, Wells was essential to the development of IU's fine arts program. The Indiana murals have achieved iconic status at the university, as a vital component of the IU Fine Arts Plaza and a campus treasure, as well as their ability to incite controversy. As they are confronted with Benton's historical construction, viewers are forced to contend with their own historical memories, revealing the ways in which current values contribute to the construction of historical narratives. Viewers' reactions to the murals depend a great deal on the degree to which their own historical narratives are in agreement with their interpretation of the one presented to them. Benton knew the Indiana murals would cause mixed reactions by those who saw them, and given their highly visible locations outside the art museum, it is likely that they will be a point of controversy again in the future.

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FIGURES



Figure 1. Thomas Hart Benton, “City Activities with Subway,” from *America Today* (1930–1931), mural cycle consisting of ten panels, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York



Figure 2. Thomas Hart Benton, “Arts of the City,” from *The Arts of Life in America* (1932), New Britain Museum of Art, New Britain, Connecticut



Figure 3. Thomas Hart Benton, *Bubbles* (1914-1917), oil on canvas, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland



Figure 4. Jose Clemente Orozco, *Epic of American Civilization* (1932-1934), fresco, Baker-Berry Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire



Figure 5. Diego Rivera, *Agrarian Leader Zapata* (1931), fresco on reinforced cement in galvanized-steel framework, Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York



6. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, *The Muses of Inspiration Hail the Spirit, the Messenger of Light* (c.1893-1896), oil on canvas, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts

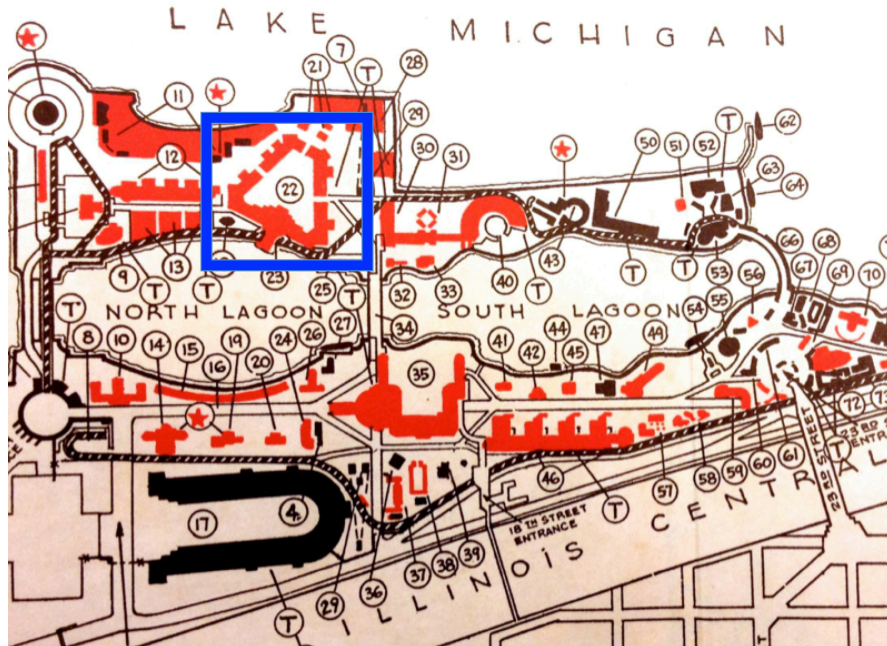


Figure 7. Map of the 1933 Fair showing location of the Court of States, indicated by blue box. *Official Guide Book of the Fair: 1933* (Chicago: Century of Progress, 1933)

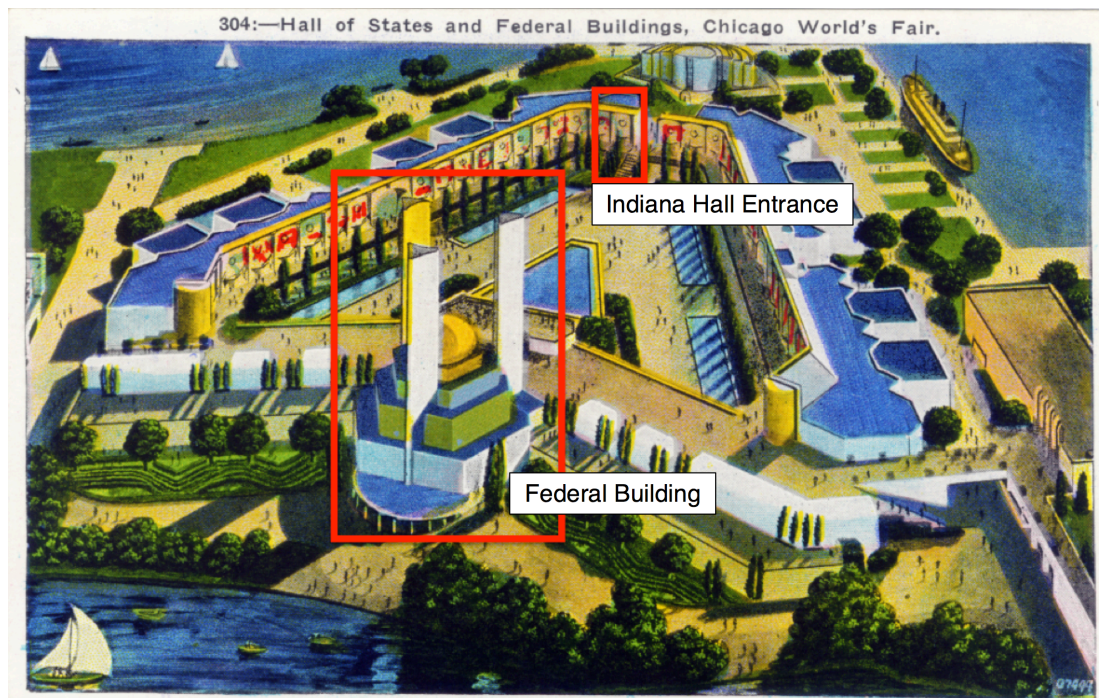


Figure 8. View of Hall of States and Federal Building, showing location of Indiana pavilion, Chicago World's Fair (1933), postcard courtesy of ChicagoPostcardMuseum.org



Figure 9. Indiana Hall interior facing west, towards entrance, (1933), photograph, Wallace Richards Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

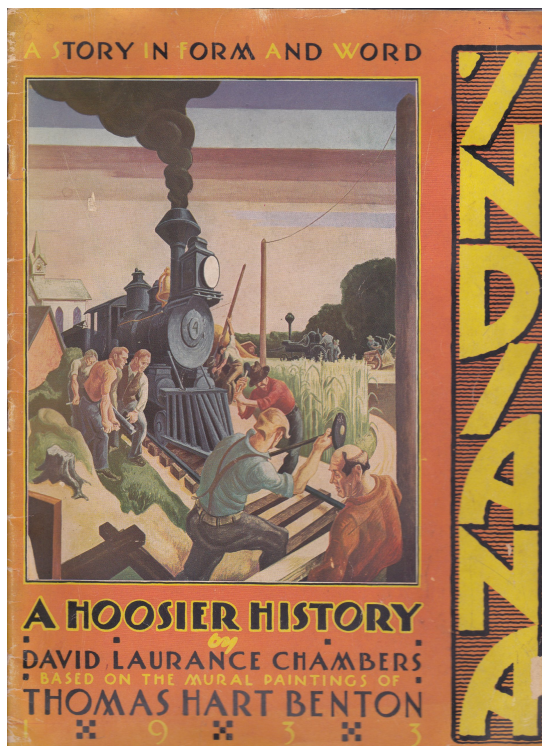


Figure 10. Cover of *Indiana: A Hoosier History; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton*, (1933), by David Laurance Chambers



Figure 11. Thomas Hart Benton, “Palisades,” from *The American Historical Epic: First Chapter* (1919-24), Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri



Figure 12. Indiana Hall interior, facing east, towards exit (1933), indicating parallel Cultural and Industrial cycles, photograph, Wallace Richards Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



Figure 13. Thomas Hart Benton, “The Indians” (Industrial 1), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Cinema, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 14. Thomas Hart Benton, “The Fur Traders” and “Pioneers” (Industrial 2 and 3), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 15. Thomas Hart Benton, “Home Industry” and “Internal Improvements” (Industrial 4 and 5), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 16. Thomas Hart Benton, “Civil War” and “Expansion” (Industrial 6 and 7), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 17. Thomas Hart Benton, “The Farmer Up and Down” and “Coal, Gas, Oil, and Brick” (Industrial 8 and 9), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 18. Thomas Hart Benton, “Electric Power, Motor Cars, Steel” (Industrial 10), from the Indiana Murals (1933), Woodburn Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 19. Thomas Hart Benton, “The Mound Builders” (Cultural 1), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Cinema, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 20. Thomas Hart Benton, “The French” and “Frontier Life” (Cultural 2 and 3), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 21. Thomas Hart Benton, “Early Schools...Communities” and “Reformers and Squatters” (Cultural 4 and 5), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 22. Thomas Hart Benton, “The Old-Time Doctor and the Grange” and “Woman’s Place” (Cultural 6 and 7), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 23. Thomas Hart Benton, “Leisure and Literature” and “Colleges and City Life” (Cultural 8 and 9), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 24. Thomas Hart Benton, “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” (Cultural 10), from the Indiana Murals (1933), Woodburn Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 25. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” (Cultural 11), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Cinema, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Black and white segment whereabouts unknown.



Figure 26. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” (Industrial 11), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Cinema, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Black and white segment whereabouts unknown.



Figure 27. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” (Industrial 11), detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), whereabouts unknown



Figure 28. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” (Cultural 11), detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Cinema, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 29. Indiana Hall interior, indicating location of the Civil War in the Industrial (left) and Cultural (right) panel cycles. Photograph, Wallace Richards Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



Figure 30. Thomas Hart Benton, Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 31. Weimer Pursell, *Wings of a Century, Romance of Transportation* (1933-4), poster for 1933 Century of Progress Exposition



Figure 32. Thomas Hart Benton, "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press," detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), Woodburn Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 33. Thomas Hart Benton, “Home Industry,” detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 34. Thomas Hart Benton, detail from “Coal, Gas, Oil, and Brick,” detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

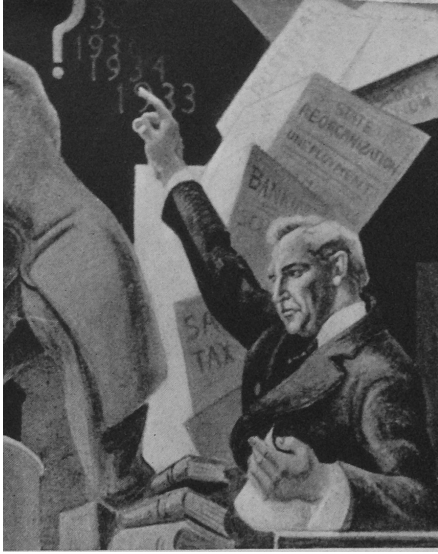


Figure 35. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought,” detail showing likeness of Governor Paul McNutt, from the Indiana Murals (1933), whereabouts unknown



Figure 36. Thomas Hart Benton, “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press,” detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), Woodburn Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

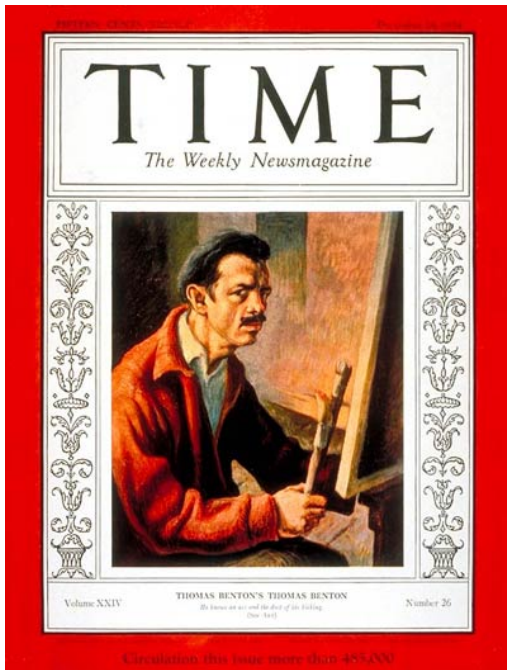


Figure 37. *Time* magazine cover featuring Thomas Hart Benton, (December 1934)

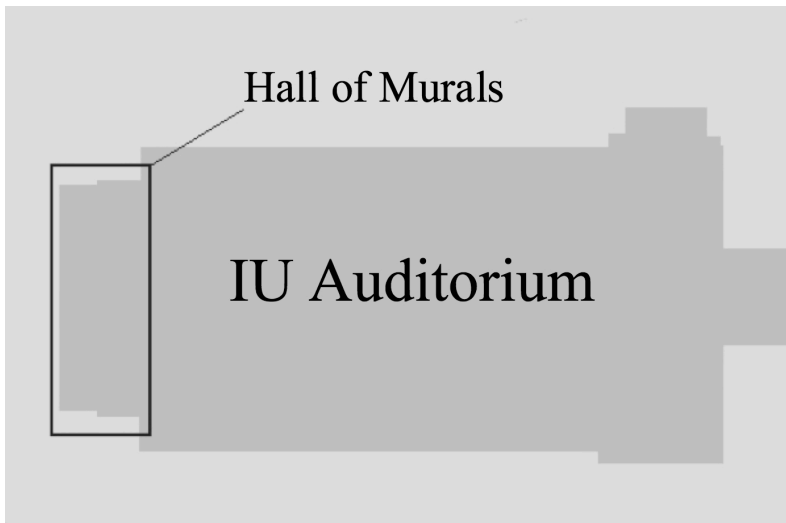


Figure 38. Diagram of IU Auditorium indicating location of the “Hall of Murals”



Figure 39. “Hall of Murals” in the IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 40. Open space on west wall, Hall of Murals, IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 41. IU Cinema, previously the University Theatre, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 42. Woodburn Hall, room 100, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 43. “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” (left) and “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” (right), arranged as originally displayed to frame the Indiana pavilion exit at the Century of Progress exposition. Black and white segments in center missing from current arrangement.



Figure 44. Hall of Murals, facing northeast corner, IU Auditorium, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 45. Hall of Murals, east wall, “The French” and “Frontier Life” from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 46. Hall of Murals, east wall, “Early Schools...Communities” and “Reformers and Squatters” from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 47. Hall of Murals, east wall, “The Old-Time Doctor and the Grange” and “Woman’s Place” from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 48. Hall of Murals, north wall, “Leisure and Literature” and “Colleges and City Life” from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 49. Hall of Murals, south wall, “The Fur Traders” and “Pioneers” from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 50. Hall of Murals, west wall, “Home Industry,” “Internal Improvements,” and “Civil War” from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 51. Hall of Murals, west wall, “Expansion,” “The Farmer Up and Down,” and “Coal, Gas, Oil, Brick” from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

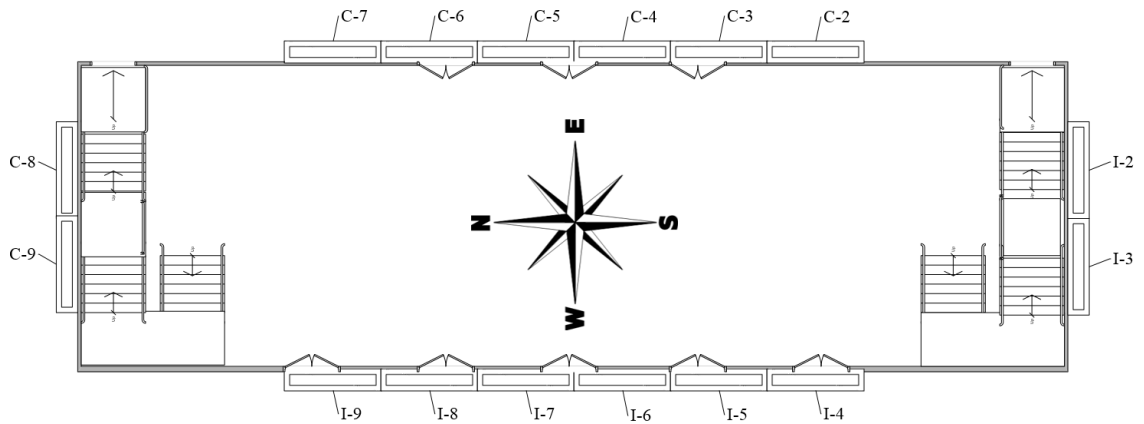


Figure 52. Diagram showing arrangement of panels in the Hall of Murals. “C” indicates the Cultural sequence, and “I” indicates the Industrial sequence.

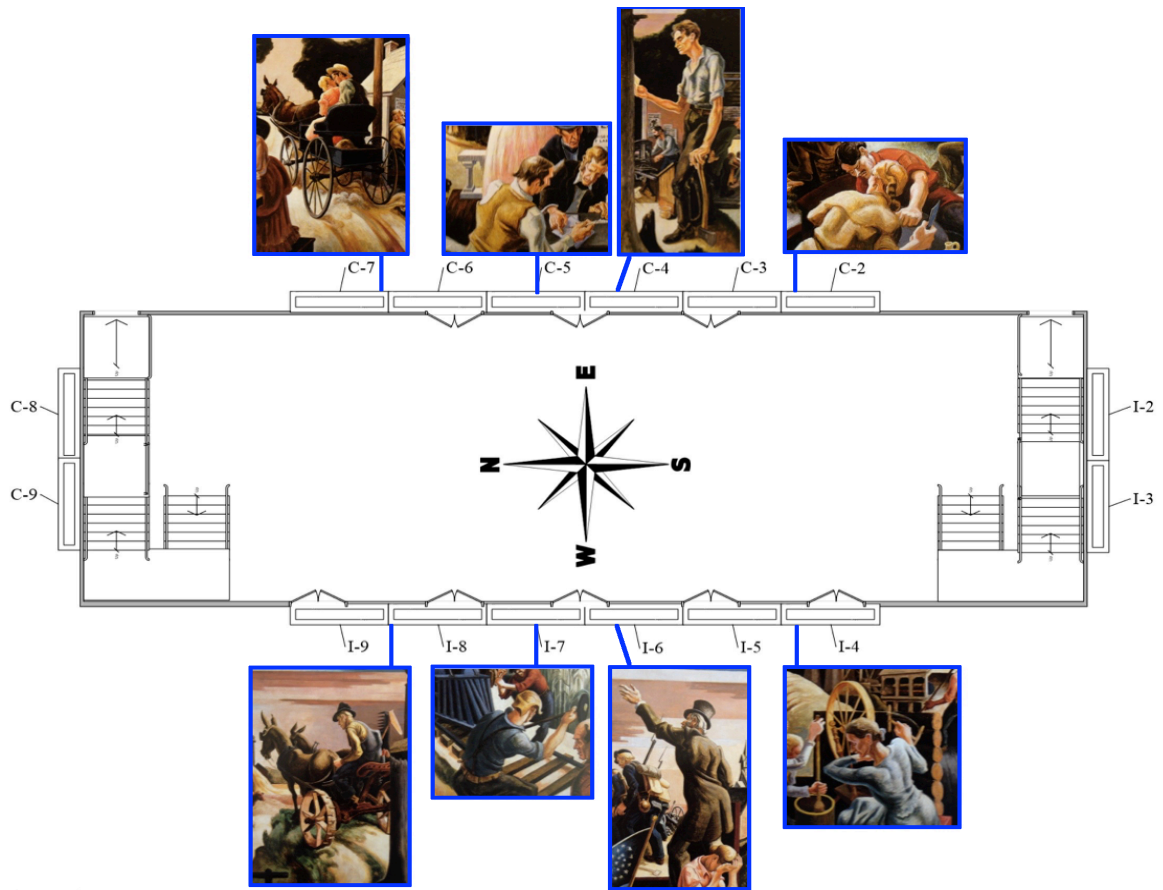


Figure 53. Diagram indicating location of the examples of visual parallelism mentioned in the text

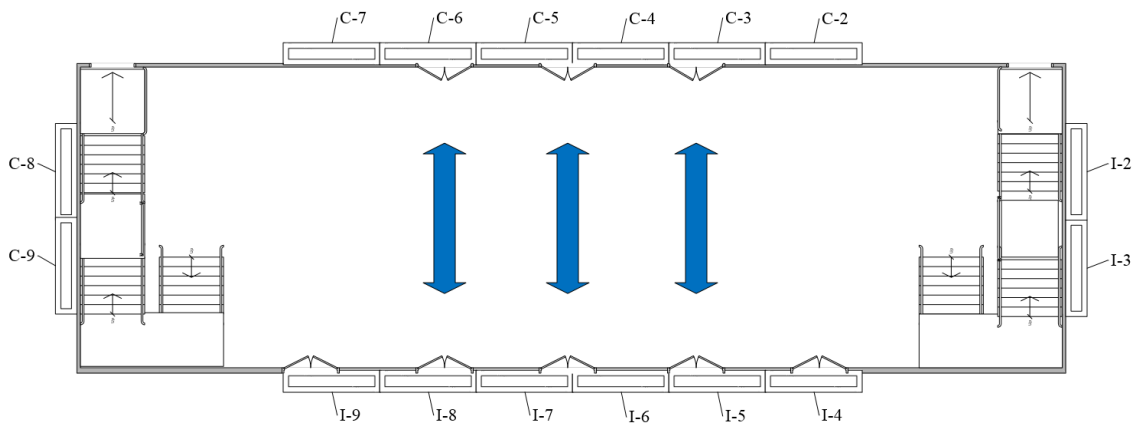


Figure 54. Diagram of Hall of Murals with arrows indicating direction of most foot traffic



Figure 55. Location of plaque on south staircase, Hall of Murals, IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 56. Hall of Murals, southeast corner, IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

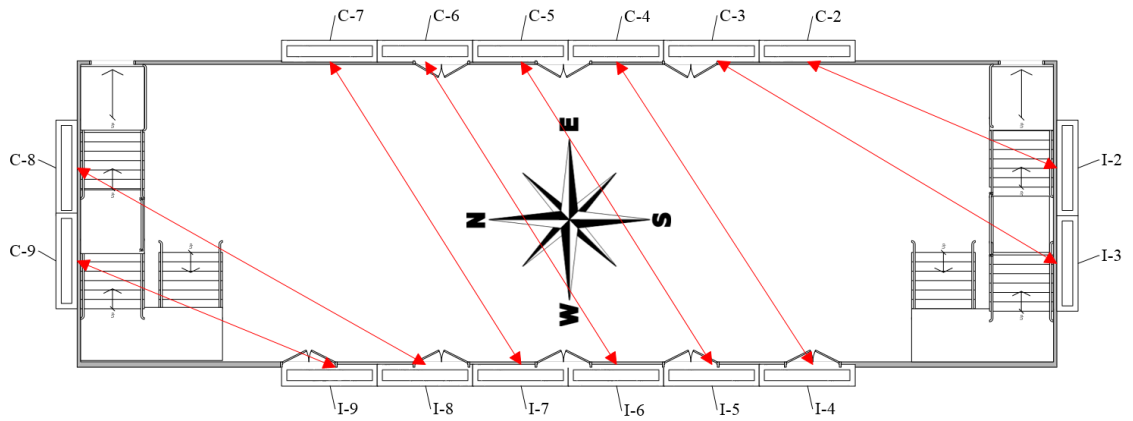


Figure 57. Diagram of Hall of Murals with arrows indicating panels originally displayed directly across from one another at the Indiana Pavilion. The Civil War is depicted in scene 6 of each sequence.



Figure 58. Hall of Murals, east wall, “Early Schools...Communities” (Cultural 4) from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 59. Charles J. Mulligan, *The Rail-splitter* (1911), cast bronze, Garfield Park, Chicago, Illinois



Figure 60. Thomas Hart Benton, “Home Industry” (Industrial 4), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 61. Thomas Hart Benton, "Civil War" (Industrial 6), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 62. Thomas Hart Benton, "Internal Improvements" (Industrial 5), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 63. Thomas Hart Benton, "Expansion" (Industrial 7), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 64. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” (Industrial 11), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

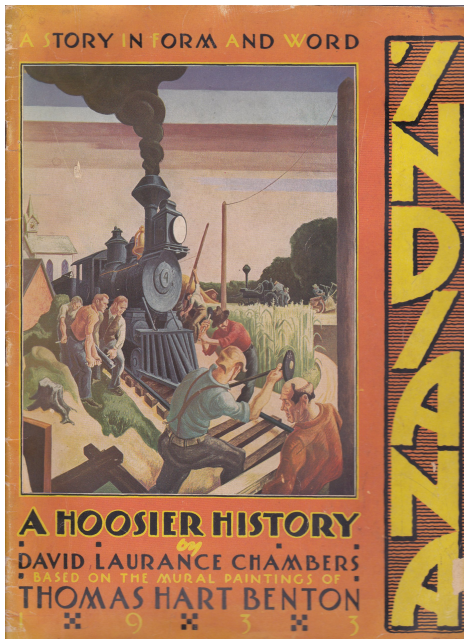


Figure 65. “Expansion” (Industrial 7) on the cover of *Indiana: A Hoosier History*; Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton by David Laurance Chambers



Figure 66. Photograph of Union Pacific’s M-10000 and Burlington’s Zephyr at Kansas City Union Station (c. late 1930s), Union Pacific Railroad Museum, Council Bluffs, Iowa



Figure 67. Thomas Hart Benton “Internal Improvements” (Industrial 5), detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 68. “Leisure and Literature” and “Colleges and City Life” (Cultural 8 and 9), from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

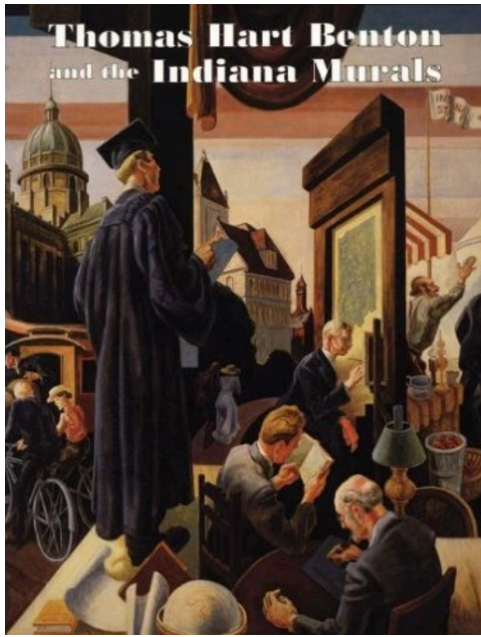


Figure 69. “Leisure and Literature” and “Colleges and City Life” (Cultural 8 and 9) on the cover of *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals* by Kathleen A. Foster, Nanette Esseck Brewer, and Margaret Contompasis



Figure 70. “Literature and Leisure” (Cultural 8), detail, from the Indiana Murals (1933), IU Auditorium, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

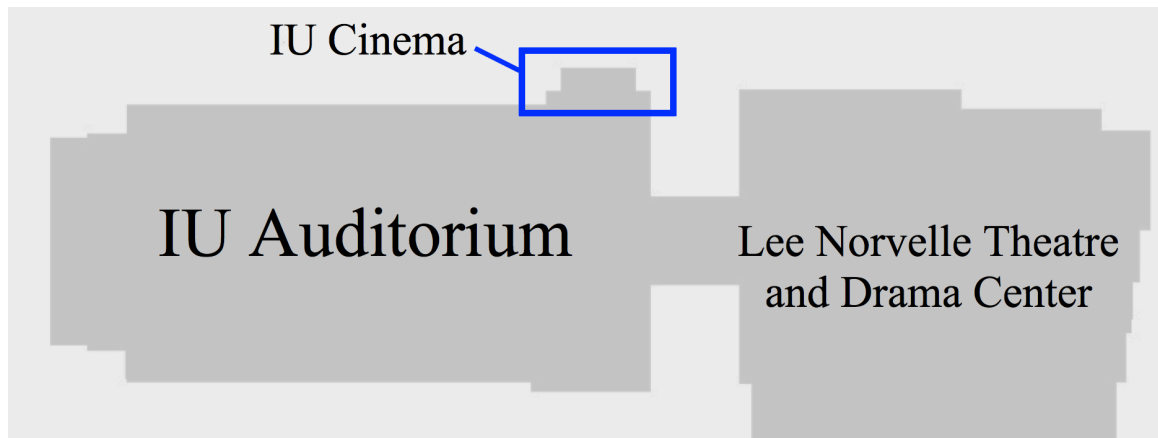


Figure 71. Diagram indicating location of Indiana University Theatre/Cinema in relation to IU Auditorium and Lee Norvelle Theatre and Drama Center



Figure 72. Interior of Indiana University Theatre from stage (1942), photograph, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Library of Congress



Figure 73. Interior of IU Cinema, facing stage, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 74. Thomas Hart Benton, "The Mound Builders," from the Indiana Murals (1933), left of screen in IU Cinema, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 75. Thomas Hart Benton, “The Indians” from the Indiana Murals (1933), right of screen in IU Cinema, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 76. IU Cinema, view from stage, with “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Work” (left) and “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought” (right), Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 77. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought,” detail of missing segment, from the Indiana Murals (1933)



Figure 78. Thomas Hart Benton, “Indiana Puts Her Trust in Thought,” from the Indiana Murals (1933), shown as displayed at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 79. Thomas Hart Benton, detail of “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” showing Klan rally, from the Indiana Murals (1933), Woodburn Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Figure 80. Woodburn Hall, room100, with “Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press” (left) and “Electric Power, Motor Cars, Steel” (right), Indiana University, Bloomington,



Figure 81. Placement of "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press," in Woodburn Hall room 100, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

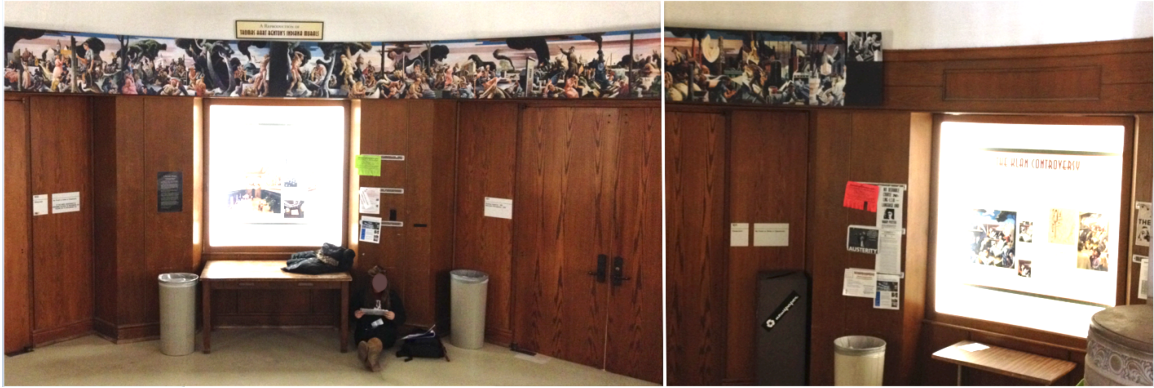


Figure 82. Educational display outside Woodburn Hall room 100, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana