

By James H. Madison

Drifting Toward Two Indianas?

Disturbing signs suggest that we are moving toward two Indianas. One prosperous; the other struggling. One educated; the other not. One mostly situated in the 21st century; the other stuck in the 1970s.

Of course the contrasts are not so stark. Not yet. Perhaps there is no problem with two Indianas. We might care only about our small portion, perhaps Central Indiana, particularly the prosperous counties around Indianapolis. We're doing fine, thank you very much. But venture south to places like Crawford County, where nearly all numbers of well-being rest near the bottom of the 92. Or to Orange County, where the future remains shaky even with massive hotel, gambling and recreation investments. Read *Crimes in Southern Indiana*. Frank Bill's rural noir fiction may be more revealing than all the tables and charts. Or glance northward to the rural counties with dwindling populations and to those of the once booming gas belt/auto region. And finally to Lake County, which a member of the state legislature decades ago suggested should be made into a separate state.

Once upon a time, there was one Indiana. In 1916, when we celebrated our state centennial, small towns and rural counties were not much different from Indianapolis. Indeed, there was a certain pride in thinking of Indianapolis as just a larger county seat town.

Those 92 county seats a hundred years ago were alive with buzzing retail stores and offices around the square, chiming bells from First Methodist and other churches off the square, and, further from downtown, the clanging of new factories.

Most important, there were engaged citizens in those towns: businessmen, doctors, lawyers, schoolteachers, Rotary Club presidents and others who cared deeply about their community. Many men and even larger numbers of women volunteered. They led. They built. They invested in a community that was more than a place name on a map. Some of the finest public libraries in the nation were among their many steps toward the general well-being.

And they innovated, as did Elwood Haynes when he drove his combustion-engine vehicle along the Pumpkinvine Pike outside Kokomo in 1894.

Not so long ago there was a touch of reality to the romantic poetry of James Whitcomb Riley. And in William Herschell's 1919 poem "Ain't God Good to Indiana?"

*Where there's sunshine in the clover
An' honey in th' comb;
Where the ripples on th' river
Kinda chuckles as they flow-
Ain't God good to Indiana?
Ain't He, fellers? Ain't He, though?*

A smart historian at this point in wistfully looking back might charge mythmaking. It was, after all, these

places, including the big small town of Indianapolis, that offered fertile soil for the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s.

It was these small towns that began in the late 19th century to send large numbers of their sons and daughters to Chicago, Detroit and New York. Even Indianapolis was not big enough for some of the best and brightest.

Still, there is an element of truth in the argument that Indiana a century ago was one place, filled with a people who had a sense of belonging together in an imagined community. A people who knew they were Hoosiers.

Recent decades have not been kind to these old traditions.

What is to be done?

The first necessity is to see the problem, particularly from leaders sitting comfortably in Indianapolis homes, restaurants and offices. Around tables in the big city, one sometimes hears conversation that can only be labeled limited. Perhaps even provincial.

We Hoosiers are bound together, all of us, in webs of social, cultural and economic connections. And, certainly, in our state government. Even a goal of individual self-interest or narrow profit maximizing requires acknowledgment of that truth.

Some may think that the privileged places can thrive without the rest of the state. Taking what they need in the way of low cost labor and tax revenues, pulling out the talented few and moving toward a colonial-mother country model. They very likely are wrong.

Part of the good news is that we're blessed with a brand name, among the best of any state. (That we don't know what the word "Hoosier" means makes it even more attractive.) We can use our brand to sell Indiana duck entrées in fancy California restaurants. And to bring us closer together.

Our Hoosier brand is most important as the headline for our shared traditions, our citizenship, our obligations to each other.

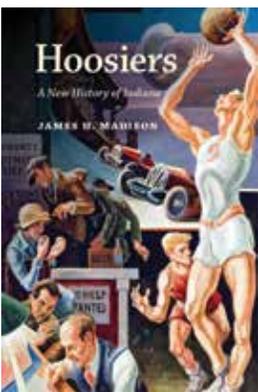
It's good, too, that sprinkled in the old Indiana are islands of light.

Warsaw provides one bright light. The Japanese auto factories in old cornfields provide others. Signs of change in towns like Kokomo offer hope.

Our community foundations often do superb work, revitalizing some of the best Hoosier traditions.

But too many places are not on the varsity team. Indeed, some aren't sure which end of the court is theirs to score.

Indiana's bicentennial will offer plenty of room for thinking about where we have been, where we are today, where we want to go. And perhaps to counter the drift toward two Indianas.



AUTHOR: James H. Madison is the Thomas and Kathryn Miller Professor Emeritus of History, Indiana University, Bloomington. His most recent book is *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, recently published by the Indiana University Press and the Indiana Historical Society Press. He can be contacted at Madison@indiana.edu