

Before I discuss the controversies surrounding this imagery and Indiana University's response, it is necessary to consider its original context.² The so-called "Klan" panel (full title: *Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press*) is a small segment of an ambitious mural project painted by Benton in 1933 (fig. 1).³ The twelve-foot-high by 250-foot-long mural, *The Social History of the State of Indiana*, was conceived as the centerpiece of the Indiana Hall at Chicago's Century of Progress International Exposition.⁴ Given the mural's size and potential for bringing Benton's work to greater public attention, it provided the perfect forum for showcasing his progressive ideas. Benton's challenge as both an artist and a historian was to create a large-scale history painting that reflected his own philosophy while at the same time speaking to hundreds of thousands of average fairgoers, such as those at Indiana Day (fig. 2). There were also special days for Jews and "Colored Americans," among others. Some black activists saw the fair itself as a rally point for Negro Protest.⁵



Figure 2. Chicago, Century of Progress Exhibition, the Court of States in "Indiana Day," July 13, 1933. Photo courtesy Wallace Richards Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

From its conception, Benton's Indiana Murals were intended to educate. Conceived as a "multi-media" interdisciplinary educational experience rather than an art exhibition, the Indiana pavilion's main room included cases displaying first editions by Indiana authors and a topographical relief map, along with Benton's egg tempera paintings. The murals, seen as part of "a story in form and word," were accompanied by a brochure written by Indianapolis publicist David Laurance Chambers. In the caption for *Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press*, Chambers acknowledges the presence of the Klan, but oddly tries to put a positive spin on this disturbing period in the state's history, claiming that "they did no violence to neighbors, raised a cry against a distant and imagined menace." He goes on to say that Indiana's sister states scoffed when a corrupt and fanatical salesman [D. C. Stephenson] influenced state politics, but admonished them to take notice that Indiana had put her house in order.⁶

Benton's narrative goes far beyond a simple catalogue of famous people and historical events. Instead, he winnows down his historical data to reflect broad social themes through the lives of average citizens. Taking his cues from progressive thinkers, such as John Dewey and Charles Beard, Benton saw the starting point for all historical inquiry to be in some present-day situation. To fully demonstrate how the past and the present interconnect, Benton designed the murals as an unbroken cycle beginning above the entrance door with the state's seal and proceeding to the left through the state's industrial history and to the right through its cultural history. There were twenty-two narrative segments displayed in parallel chrono-

logical bands. The cycle ended in current time (1933) in two small (now lost) panels above the exit door into the next room: one depicting the state's governor, Paul V. McNutt, pointing up to the coming years, and the other a black steelworker building to the future (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Chicago, Century of Progress Exhibition, interior of Indiana Hall looking east towards exit, 1933. Photo courtesy Wallace Richards Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Following the exposition, the murals were stored at the Indiana State Fairgrounds until their reinstallation at three sites on the campus of Indiana University in 1939.⁷ This unfortunate breaking up of the panels due to space limitations is one of the primary arguments for the removal of the *Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press* (Cultural Panel 10) from the classroom that it currently shares with its corresponding panel, *Electric Power, Motor-Cars, Steel* (Industrial Panel 10), both depicting Indiana in the 1920s (fig. 4). In its original context, the panel would have been seen on an angled side wall at the end of a long gallery, where viewers would have already experienced many other scenes, including a Quaker woman aiding a runaway slave through the Underground Railroad. It is now isolated from the rest of the series with the Klan scene displayed at eye level, rather than at above twelve feet. While it is clear that Benton's complex thematic and stylistic parallelism has been compromised, he felt

that the current installation retained the essential rhythms of the composition.⁸

In order to accomplish such a complex and monumental task, Benton relied on meticulous planning and hundreds of preparatory drawings (eighty-nine of which are in the Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University). For the Indiana project, Benton spent approximately four of the six months he had to complete the project on the drawing process. He traveled more than three thousand miles around the state learning about the people he drew and hearing their stories, including many about the Ku Klux Klan's dramatic rise and fall from power in the early twenties.



Figure 4. Installation shot of *Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press* and *Electric Power, Motor-Cars, Steel* in Woodburn Hall, Room 100, Indiana University, 2012. Photo: Kevin O. Mooney.

Although Benton had a lifelong passion for American history, he later recalled, "As I had to begin from scratch, knowing nothing of Indiana's history, the first month was given over to research and traveling over the state to get the 'feel' of it."⁹ Benton worked for the first three weeks in the State Library researching the state's historical events and roughing out the basic narrative. Progressive historians understood that history should reflect all of human experience—including our collective failures as well as our

successes—and that we couldn't grow in the future if we didn't learn from the past.

For Benton, too, this pragmatic approach meant the inclusion of several controversial elements in the Indiana murals, such as a French trader plying a Native American with liquor to steal his land, the forced removal of eight hundred Potawatomi on the "Trail of Death," the squandering of natural gas, a labor strike in Terre Haute, and the Klan (most shown on a smaller scale than the more positive imagery and up near the horizon). While not generally covered in the history texts that he had seen in the State Library, Benton felt such scenes were essential to tell the whole story and, in essence, to keep their memories alive and not repeat the mistakes of the past.¹⁰ An early compositional plan shows a small note to add "Ku Klux" in the far-left margin.¹¹

Like many of the mural's panels, *Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press*, is a juxtaposition of pros and cons.¹² In the lower right-hand corner, Colonel Richard Lieber (the Indiana World's Fair commissioner who hired Benton) is shown planting a tree as the head of the state's conservation program. Lieber initially opposed inclusion of the KKK rally (or Klavalkade)—not for fear of inciting Klan support but out of public embarrassment. Through some clever political persuasion (and a bit of Brown County whiskey) at a nightly cocktail party that he nicknamed the "children's hour," Benton reminded his Democratic patrons that not only did the murals need to be truthful but that the Klan's power had happened under the past administration. His plan worked and in the end Lieber conceded and the "Kluxers" remained.¹³

Above Lieber is a circus headquartered in Peru, Indiana. While it may seem incongruous to have such a jolly scene

next to the Klan rally, the church behind the burning cross provides a clue. This seemingly generic steeple is actually St. Charles Borromeo Church in Peru. Its Roman Catholic denomination suggests the intense persecution of Catholics by the Klan during that period and its ironic appropriation of religion and patriotism (some of the Klansmen have a red aura of the devil). Many circus performers were also outsiders and foreigners counter to the Klan's nationalistic aims.

Interestingly, immigrants and African Americans—who had come north during the Great Migration—were often the folks working in the northern Indiana factories depicted in the corresponding Industrial Panel 10.

Directly below the Klan is a spotlighted scene depicting a white, blond nurse administering to both a black and a white child (fig. 5). This deliberately staged scene of racial integration, which didn't happen in Indiana hospitals until after the Klan's demise, was intended as a "strong statement *for* tolerance and *against* bigotry."¹⁴ As IU history professor Eric Sandweiss observed, the nurse's white uniform and pointed cap serve as a visual analog to the Klansmen's robes.¹⁵ Could the bandaged black girl, Jiminy, represent the suffering imparted by the Klan's hatred?¹⁶ If so, the presence of the civic heroes (nurses, firefighters, and conservationists) serves as a counterbalance.¹⁷ Nevertheless, some contemporary African-American viewers have not seen this scene as positive, but rather as demeaning and patronizing, with a giant white woman looming over a fragile black child.¹⁸

The newspapermen in the mural's foreground indicate the power of the free press, representing a "just civic sphere" to depose the Klan.¹⁹ Soon after the Klan's membership peaked in 1924, relentless

Pulitzer prize-winning coverage by the *Indianapolis Times* on issues of bribery and corruption, as well as the arrest of the Klan's leader D. C. Stephenson on rape and murder charges, brought down the state's governor and the mayor of Indianapolis. However, the photographer with his box camera and the reporter with his typewriter look toward the central hospital scene rather than back to the Klan. In Benton's attempt to create a cultural continuum, the scene of a modern pressman contrasts with the nineteenth-century printer making runaway slave posters in Cultural Panel 4; thus, reversing the role of the media in the state's history of race relations. The nurse, too, harks back in a more positive sense to the country doctor (Cultural Panel 6) and women reformers aiding the infirm (Cultural Panel 5).



Figure 5. Thomas Hart Benton. *Nurse [Dorothy Garrigus]*, 1933. Graphite on paper. Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University 87.19.1. Photo: Michael Cavanaugh and Kevin Montague.

The fire brigade in the upper left-hand corner, with its water hose mirroring the church steeple, not only signifies an improvement in fire protection (a cause supported by Colonel Lieber), but may offer a reference to putting out the flames of the Klan. The red glow of the fire falls on the large roll of newsprint—the Klan's

popular newspaper was called the *Fiery Cross*. The planes, likewise, suggest Benton's progressive belief in the hopeful power of new technology, while the planting of a tree sapling and a ladder allude to wisdom and harmony.²⁰

Would the average fair visitor in 1933 have recognized all of these elements? Probably not, although over half of the visitors were said to have appreciated the general purpose and content of the mural. However, memories of the Klan's relatively recent history would certainly have made it easier to understand the narrative as a positive symbol of change, rather than as a call to racism. As the exhibition's supervisor, Wallace Richards, explained "not all that is shown in this mural is pretty, but it is real. The Klan was active in Indiana, whether we like to admit or not."²¹

Art historian Henry Adams surmised that Benton left his meanings and social viewpoints intentionally ambiguous, in order that the work could continue to live on through spectator comments and criticism.²² If so, his plan is certainly working. The reaction need not be a positive one to be successful. As Benton observed, "Art does not teach its meanings, it reveals them. We do see and evaluate things differently and combative reactions almost more than anything else indicate real concern."²³ Benton certainly didn't shy away from racially sensitive subjects, including slave markets and lynching scenes, but his Klan imagery remains his most controversial, perhaps because the presence of such hate groups lingers, while the other events recall horrors of the past.²⁴ I can't help but think that Benton would be pleased that his eighty-five-year-old painting continues to stimulate dialogue about race issues that, unfortunately, still plague our country.

When the Indiana Murals were unveiled in 1941 at the dedication of the IU Auditorium, there appeared to be little concern about their content.²⁵ There was also remarkably little public commentary about the panel in Woodburn 100 over the next four decades.²⁶ Appreciation for regionalists' work was itself at a low ebb. There were no labels in any of the Indiana murals' locations until the late 1980s.²⁷ Although a small exhibition of Benton's preparatory drawings was held in 1983 for the fiftieth anniversary of the murals' creation, I found the studies uncatalogued on a storage shelf in 1987.²⁸

Nevertheless, the murals had some significant champions. When Woodburn Hall was remodeled in 1980, IU art museum curator Heidi Gealt and art history professor Bruce Cole began a campaign to have the two panels in the room protected and conserved. They applied for an NEA grant in 1982 for their conservation, but it was not granted, due in part to the lack of climate control or any departmental oversight of the room. Gealt wrote a memo to chancellor Herman B Wells, head of the university's Heritage Committee, explaining the difficulties and inherent damage that would be associated with moving the murals to another location but adding that "it is in the best interests of the murals to put them under greater protection."²⁹

Unfortunately, improved security measures weren't taken in time. In May of 1983, Cultural Panel 10 was vandalized by a black spray-painted X over the KKK rally with the words "THE KLAN MUST STOP" scratched in the paint and "BAN the KLAN!" scrawled on the frame below (fig. 6).³⁰ Although the damage was removable, it revealed some deep-seated negative feelings about the subject matter and the venerability of the artwork.



Figure 6. Vandalized *Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press*, 1983. Conservation files, Eksenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University. Photo: Ken Strothman and Harvey Osterhoudt.

Like many controversies surrounding this panel, a complaint in 1986 stemmed from another incident.³¹ A black intramural basketball team had received hate letters and took their concerns to IU President John Ryan. Seeing the panel as a unifying symbol of their anger, they asked for its removal. Although Michael Gordon, IU dean of students, looked into moving the panel or substituting another one from the series, he opted for a simpler approach. By March 1988, a relatively short label was placed by the doorway into the room explaining Benton's commitment to human rights and the role of the press in exposing the Klan. There was even a mention as to the relatively diminished scale of the latter. A smaller

plaque next to the mural itself explained the panel's content and condemned the Klan's "pathetic and manipulative character." At the same time, an explanatory label appeared in the old men's gymnasium near pre-World War II-era wall tiles bearing swastika symbols, which were frequently lumped in with the Benton mural complaints.

Things did not stay quiet for long. The following year representatives from the IU Black Student Union (BSU) expressed concern that the mural incited racist comments in the classroom and negatively affected the learning environment. The vice president of the BSU, Dara Neely, recounted racial slurs like *Look at that little nigger baby in the picture, Too bad the Klan's not thriving like it used to be*, and *The Klan ought to take care of the niggers on this campus* as examples of the hatred prompted by the panel's imagery.³² Their protests came at a time of national backlash against numerous racist incidents on college campuses around the country. IU, too, was the site of several physical and verbal attacks, and minority students were being asked to report any such events. An eleven-person task force (part of Commission on Racial Understanding) was formed to consider removing, moving, or covering the mural. It initially recommended that the panel be moved and another one from the series put in its place; however, that vote was quickly nullified. It ultimately recommended leaving the mural in full view and using it for educational purposes—emphasizing the importance of academic freedom and artistic expression, while also noting that the cost of moving the panel could be as much as \$50,000 to \$75,000.³³ As IU chancellor Kenneth Gros Louis explained, "It is the way of the university to educate rather than to take down or conceal, to

put things into context, explain things in all the ways that we can, rather than practicing censorship by removing it or covering it."³⁴

In 1998, discontent with the IU dean of Afro-American Affairs over an alleged racist comment led some black students to call for his resignation. Although tangential to their primary concerns, a heated racial climate renewed concerns about the presence of the Klan imagery in a classroom.³⁵ It was decided to produce an educational video to be shown to all students on their first day of class in the space (something that had been suggested years earlier). The six-minute video includes reactions from three minority students to the Klan symbolism, with further explanation about the panel's content and significance by me and the current and former IU dean of students.³⁶ A trained facilitator was also to be on hand to answer any questions.

The biggest uproar came in 2002, when twenty-nine members of the BSU political action committee marched to the Student Ethics and Harassment Program office demanding that the offensive panel be covered or removed (thirty-one written complaints were filed against the mural and five for it). Two town hall meetings (February 11 and March 6), organized by the BSU, were held in order to allow students to voice their opinions about the mural. One got particularly heated when students showed the official video and a self-produced counterpoint that suggested the Klan imagery, the "readily available racists influence on the walls," might generate a similar incident to the one at a white fraternity at Auburn University in Alabama, where members took pictures dressed in blackface with ropes around their necks simulating lynching. Some even called for the mural's destruction.³⁷ The panel's hostile imagery

was compared to a pinup girl calendar adversely affecting a woman's workplace environment, and to nude public art on campus, such as Robert Laurent's *Birth of Venus*.³⁸ Questions of censorship inevitably arose with an *Indiana Daily Student* cartoonist humorously equating the possible covering of the Klan panel with US Attorney General John Ashcroft's draping of a curtain over a seminude female sculpture, *Spirit of Justice*, during his press conferences (fig. 7).



Figure 7. Shane Johnson, *Editorial Cartoon*, *Indiana Daily Student*, February 22, 2002. Photo courtesy Indiana University Archives, Bloomington.

A Racial Incidents Team recommended that the murals be removed and transferred to a more appropriate location, or alternatively, that Woodburn 100 be repurposed and not used as classroom space. The latter suggestion posed additional difficulties in that Woodburn 100 (capacity 424) was the largest lecture hall on campus. Instead, a new video was produced under the direction of the BSU with the assistance of a group of experts.³⁹ This ten-and-a-half minute video begins with a three-minute documentary-style background on the mural's history and then four minutes of various students and faculty giving their reactions and perspectives on the Klan panel. All

opinions are given equal weight, and none of the speakers are identified.

The video ends with the president of the BSU giving a one-minute explanation as to the group's stance on the issue and a call for continued protest and concludes with Chancellor Sharon Behm's explanation as to why she had taken a more proactive approach to address symptomatic issues, such as a lack of student and faculty diversity and a need for more artwork by minority artists on campus, instead of removing the artwork. She committed \$800,000 to minority recruitment efforts and a "One for Diversity" art fund and ultimately concluded that "when we live in a more inclusive, diverse society both on campus and off, the Benton mural will be seen for what it is—the portrait of a moment in the history of Indiana when a free press took on the Klan and prevailed."⁴⁰

In addition to screening the video, twenty-five-minute discussion sessions with a member of the Benton Mural Education Committee were held immediately following. Students were given index cards on which they could write down their personal reactions to the mural imagery or, later, answer a set of standardized questions, in order to gauge the video's effectiveness.⁴¹ IU political science professors Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright found their class discussions about the mural to be such a valuable education tool on American civil liberties that they included IU's Klan controversy as a prompt in their textbook.⁴²

Two years later, when US presidential candidate Reverend Al Sharpton spoke at IU, a student in the audience asked for his help in getting the Benton panel removed and placed in a museum. Although apparently he had only looked at the mural for about five minutes, Sharpton

told the waiting crowd of almost 2,000 people that he would do anything he could to get the “offensive” painting down. IU’s first African-American president, Adam Herbert, disagreed, saying that “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 . . . I don’t want you to grow up not understanding that black people were lynched in the country. I don’t want you to grow up not being aware of torture that young black children and adults suffered at the hand of the Ku Klux Klan.”⁴³ He went on to liken it to the need of the Jewish community to open Holocaust museums. Others, like Charlie Nelms, IU’s vice president for Student Affairs, who had given a talk, “Art, Diversity, or Censorship: Who Decides?” on a black man’s response to this controversy, concurred.⁴⁴

After many years of repeated showings (often without a facilitator available), the IU faculty began to question the effectiveness of the room’s educational video and their loss of class time. It was, however, felt that some sort of educational program was needed or that the controversy associated with the mural’s symbolism would surface again with new students. In 2011, with support from the IU Parents Annual Fund, a new, larger, didactic display was added to the foyer outside of the classroom space. Although several ideas were floated, including placing a computer monitor in the room and artwork or signs made by an African-American artist or students on the walls next to the murals, a low-tech series of plaques was the final choice. By putting the information outside of the room, it reduced the risk of unintentionally supporting a misreading of the

panels as pro-Klan, distracting from their artistic significance, and disturbing classes. The didactic display hoped to recontextualize the panels by including a facsimile of the entire cycle around the periphery and by providing information on Benton, the fair, how they came to IU, and the history of the Klan controversy (fig. 8). A symposium was held to kick off the installation.⁴⁵ When attendance was relatively low, I hoped that it was an indication that more students understood the panel’s “anti-Klan” message and were no longer disturbed by it. I was sadly mistaken.



Figure 8. Didactic display, foyer outside of Woodburn 100, Nan Brewer giving a tour for NEH Summer Institute for School Teachers, 2011. Photo: Kevin Montague.

The most recent controversy incorrectly equated the Woodburn panel with Confederate monuments, which were intended to glorify and promote racist ideas not to critique them. There has been lots of national press and some excellent rebuttals, including Henry Adams’ piece in *The Conversation*, which emphasized Benton’s early denouncement of the KKK as spiritually bankrupt in *The Arts* (1924) and his involvement with the NAACP’s 1935 anti-lynching exhibition.⁴⁶ Jessie Benton, the artist’s daughter, defended her father’s

liberal minded politics, sympathetic portrayal of African Americans, and commitment to diversity in a guest column to the local newspaper and told an IU student reporter of his pure intentions.⁴⁷ A panel discussion with a diverse group of IU faculty and students was held on September 28, 2017.⁴⁸ While the conversation was generally thoughtful and civil, an audience member accused the white historians of being the only ones in support of the panel and African-American law school professor Kevin Brown denounced Charlie Nelms for his support of the panel's continued display in the past.⁴⁹ The next morning executive vice president and provost, Lauren Robel, issued a two thousand-word statement saying the Woodburn 100 would no longer be used as a classroom. Although noting that "every society that has gone through divisive trauma of any kind has learned the bitter lesson of suppressing memories and discussion of its past; Benton murals are intended to provoke thought," she concluded that the complexity of his imagery is not easily understood out of context and without extensive explanation."⁵⁰ Given the mural's artistic importance and the ongoing discomfort of some students despite numerous educational efforts, this seemed like the best compromise for the artwork's protection and the students' wellbeing. The murals in Woodburn 100 can still be seen by appointment, for class discussions related to the murals, for tours, and for lectures; and a new brochure and website have been created to explain the Klan panel's narrative.⁵¹

What have I learned from my decades of dealing with cyclical controversies surrounding this imagery? I've learned how difficult it is to create a public memory of the past that is both culturally relevant and socially acceptable; that not

everyone is familiar with the concept of art as social commentary; that reactions to one thing can often be the transference of negative feelings about a larger issue; that even understanding the artist's intent doesn't always change a person's deep-seated and honest feelings about a charged symbol; that well-intentioned educational tools aren't always effective; and most importantly, that we need to continue to support public art as a means for discussing relevant issues within our society. Hopefully, it is only a matter of time before the IU students start asking for more opportunities to see these historic masterpieces.

¹ The petition was started by IU alumna Jacqueline Barrie and claimed that the image of the KKK was in violation of the university's diversity policy and student Right to Freedom from Discrimination code.

² This summary of IU-related incidents and responses is based in part on an internal memo from Catherine Dyar, chief of staff (prepared with the assistance of speech writer Joe Hiland), to IU provost and executive vice president, Lauren Robel (September 18, 2017). It is not meant as a comprehensive timeline. Woodburn Mural Controversy, Benton files, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University.

³ Portions of this essay are derived from two essays by the author in Kathleen A. Foster, Nanette Esseck Brewer, and Margaret Contompasis, *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Art Museum, 2000/2008).

⁴ For a complete overview of the Indiana Mural commission, see Kathleen A. Foster's essay, "Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals" in Foster, Brewer, and Contompasis, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 7–32.

⁵ For more information on Colored American (Negro) Day and the reactions of African Americans in Chicago to the World's Fair, see

Christopher Robert Reed's "A Reinterpretation of Black Strategies for Change at the Chicago World's Fair, 1933–1934," *Illinois Historical Journal* 81, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 2–12. While several other fair displays are discussed, there is no mention of the Indiana exhibit, nor was there any mention of the Indiana murals in the *Chicago Defender*, the city's premiere African-American newspaper.

⁶ David Laurance Chambers. *Indiana, A Hoosier History: Based on the Mural Paintings of Thomas Hart Benton* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1933), 42. On page 48 of Chamber's text, he devotes nearly a page to further explanation of how the revived KKK attracted 40 percent of white, protestant, Hoosier men by appealing to their fraternal spirit, love of pageantry, patriotism, and religiosity, as well as their fear of bootleggers, immigrants, and black laborers from the South. He ends by noting, "If there is little to Indiana's credit in her Klan history, it is to be remembered in her favor that she proceeded relentlessly but with due process of law to prosecute the corrupt and avaricious politicians. And that is more than many of her sister states can claim."

⁷ Other locations on campus were originally considered, such as University School, Alpha Hall, Library, Student Building, and Assembly Hall, but these sites were either too costly or too small (letter from fine art professor Harry Engel to IU president Herman B Wells, May 4, 1938). Comptroller W. G. Biddle wrote to architect A. M. Strauss on June 14, 1938, that Cultural and Industrial Panels 10 could be temporarily stored in the new Business Administration building (now Woodburn Hall) until a new fine arts building was constructed, but he envisioned their ultimate replacement with attractive but inexpensive photographic murals depicting industry. In a second letter to Herman B Wells (June 20, 1938), he explained, "Personally I am very doubtful of the advisability of trying to work these into the plans of the Business Administration building. Instead, I think these murals should be in one gallery where people can get the benefit of the historical sequence." The ultimate choice of the Business Administration building for these so-called "lesser important panels" (letter from Herman B Wells to Governor M. Clifford Townsend, March 23, 1939) may have been based in part on their differing size from the other panels, circular compositions, and near contemporary "business" themes. All correspondence in Benton, Thomas Hart—Murals

1939, IU President's Office records, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (C213.67 ALF).

⁸ Letter from Thomas Hart Benton to Harry Engel, March 7, 1939. Engel mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University.

⁹ Thomas Hart Benton, *An American in Art: A Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 69.

¹⁰ Benton had already explored themes of American history in his painting cycles *The American Historical Epic* (1919–1924), *America Today* (1930), *The Arts of Life in America* (1932), and his illustrations for Leo Huberman's *We, the People* (1932), however none of these works include any direct reference to the Ku Klux Klan. For more on the development of Benton's historical imagery, see Nanette Esbeck Brewer, "Benton as Hoosier Historian: Constructing a Visual Narrative in the Indiana Murals," in Foster, Brewer, and Contompasis, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 137–65.

¹¹ Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1937/1983), 253. Benton said that he added the Klan element in his second mural plan. The Eskenazi Museum of Art's collection includes seven drawings related to Cultural Panel 10. Another drawing for this panel of the little black girl appeared on an episode of *Antiques Roadshow* (Baltimore 2007), see Dennis Gaffney, "A Man and His Mural," *Antiques Roadshow Online* (January 14, 2008) www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/fts/baltimore_200701A33

¹² Unlike the long side segments of the mural that interconnect in a serpentine flow, the panels in Woodburn Hall feature a more congested array of scenes that can be read in a circular direction per the order of their titles. In the original Chicago installation, the Klan panel was on the right and the Steel panel on the left. In the Woodburn Hall installation, this order is reversed.

¹³ Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 253–54.

¹⁴ This statement comes from the recollections of Philip B. Reed, assistant superintendent of Indianapolis City Hospital (now Eskenazi Health),

in a letter to the editor, *Indiana University Alumni Magazine* 53, no. 4 (March–April 1991): 3–4. Dr. Reed recalled Benton’s rapid tour of Ward C3 and his obvious sense of purpose as he strode through the hospital scanning for proper subjects until finding what he said was exactly what he wanted. Benton did not comment on his choice, but when Reed asked Benton’s assistant, this was what he was told. Benton’s inclusion of the “hospital bed in which white persons gave free treatment to a Negro child” in addition to the KKK rally was also cited as an example of how the artist wasn’t painting “socialistic preachments,” but rather an accurate pictorial representation of Indiana’s history in Virginia Gardner, “Indiana’s Art Stirs Conflict at World Fair,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 1933.

¹⁵ Sandweiss’s observation was made at a panel discussion, “Art, Public Memory, and Racial Justice: The Case of the Benton Mural in WH100,” Political and Civic Engagement (PACE), Indiana University, September 28, 2017.

¹⁶ For more on Benton’s depictions of African-American subjects, see Austen Barron Bailly, “Art for America: Race in Thomas Hart Benton’s Murals, 1919–1936” *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (June 2009): 150–66. Jiminy is the only figure in the Klan panel (and one of the few in the entire mural cycle) who looks out towards the viewer.

¹⁷ Justin Wolff. *Thomas Hart Benton: A Life*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 230–31.

¹⁸ As graduate student Thomas Schuster wrote in a letter to the editor, “Stereotypical role models are promoted rather than progressive ones that encourage women and black people to more aggressively take an active role in society. The artwork clearly states that it is the white man that keeps this country going and that it is the black man that is the object of prosecution or, if lucky, the recipient of pity in the form of a black child being taken care of in a hospital bed.” “Murals Don’t Belong,” *Indiana Daily Student*, November 17, 1989.

¹⁹ Erika Doss, “Action, Agency, Affect: Thomas Hart Benton’s Hoosier History” *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 2 (June 2009): 135.

²⁰ The tree could also suggest the Knights of the

Green Forest, which Chambers notes was formed after the Imperial Wizard ordered the Klan unmasked in 1928, in order to aid immigrants assimilating to this country. Chambers, *Indiana, A Hoosier History*, 48.

²¹ As quoted in Virginia Gardner, “Indiana’s Story Is Narrated to Its Daughters at Fair,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 13, 1933.

²² Henry Adams, “Thomas Hart Benton: Focus of Controversy” (typescript, ca. 1989), unpaginated. Henry Adams Paper, Benton files, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University.

²³ Thomas Hart Benton. “American Art” (typescript, no date), 5. Wallace Richards Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²⁴ Henry Adams notes that Benton was the first artist to depict the Klan in a major work, but that he had difficulty getting his publisher to include an image of the Indiana painting in his 1989 monograph on the artist. *Thomas Hart Benton: Discoveries and Interpretations* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2015), 236–37.

²⁵ The Business Administration building opened in the summer of 1940, ahead of the IU Auditorium’s March 22, 1941, dedication. Most contemporary articles focused on the Indiana Murals’ modern style and grittiness, although one reporter commented on the “two-sexed angels” in the New Harmony scene and the lipstick-wearing prostitute in the Gary speakeasy. He went on to quote a *St. Louis Post Dispatch* writer who claimed, “Its State University is going to have a collection of murals, which people will look at, study, talk about, and sooner or later, come to appreciate.” Monte M. Katterjohn, “Benton Wins Long Battle,” April 13, 1941? (clipping, unknown newspaper). Benton Murals 1940–89, Office of Communication and Marketing, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (2000/040.2).

²⁶ Although racial tensions were high on the IU campus in the late 1960s, especially after three KKK members, including a regional Grand Dragon, were charged with firebombing the Afrocentric store The Black Market, the Benton panel wasn’t the target of any related criticism in an article on the fire in a left-leaning student publication, *The Spectator* VII, no. 13 (January 7, 1969): 4–5 or in the IU Office of Afro-American Affairs newsletters,

The Black Student Voice (1968) and *The Black Wheel* (1970).

²⁷ President Herman B Wells had immediately expressed a need for a plaque in the IU Auditorium explaining the story of the murals, how and when they were commissioned, how they came to IU, how and why their current arrangement was arrived at, and how it differed from their original installation, but this plan was nixed by Harry Engel, who felt that a plaque would be entirely out of place and that it would not be read. W. G. Biddle (memo) to Herman B Wells, November 3, 1937. Benton, Thomas Hart—Murals 1939, IU President's Office records, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (C213.67).

²⁸ An exhibition of all eighty-eight of the museum's drawings, *Thomas Hart Benton and the Indiana Murals: The Making of a Masterpiece*, with an accompanying brochure, was held at the Eskenazi Museum of Art (formerly Indiana University Art Museum) (April 4–May 21, 1989), in conjunction with the centenary of Benton's birth. A small exhibition of drawings was apparently held in the second floor of the library in 1941, when the murals came to IU. There were 210 drawings in the original gift to IU (current location of the remaining drawings is unknown). An additional study for the cycle was donated to the museum in 2008.

²⁹ Heidi Gealt (memo) to Herman B Wells, April 1, 1982. Benton, Thomas Hart—Murals 1972–1986, IU President's Office records, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (C459.35).

³⁰ Peter Fraenkel, assistant to the president, wrote a memo to IU president John W. Ryan (May 5, 1983) about two incidents of vandalism in the span of about a week. Additional protective measures were also discussed, including locking the room when not in use, an alarm system, and shatterproof Plexiglas cover. Benton, Thomas Hart—Murals 1972–1986, IU President's Office records, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (C459.35). Another incident of vandalism involving the spraying of an obscene statement in bright red paint over the lower right quarter of the mural occurred in March 1991. Conservator Martin J. Radecki, Indianapolis Museum of Art, noted that the red pigment was particularly difficult to remove from the white areas of the dress and sheet in the hospital scene. Treatment

report, Thomas Hart Benton Mural—Woodburn Hall, Benton files, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University.

³¹ Mention of this earlier incident is reported in Richard Gilbert, "Mural Stirs IU Racial Controversy," *Bloomington/Bedford Sunday Herald-Times*, November 19, 1989.

³² As quoted in Gilbert, "IU Racial Controversy."

³³ Becky Gaylord. "IU Report: The KKK Scene in Thomas Hart Benton's Mural Stirred Up Controversy in the 1930s. In the '90s Not Much Has Changed." *Bloomington Monthly* (May 1990): 17–19.

³⁴ As quoted by Teri Klassen in "Mural with KKK Figures to Stay in Classroom," *Bloomington Herald-Times*, March 29, 1990. A draft letter from Michael V. W. Gordon, Vice Chancellor and Dean of Students, to all faculty using the room about the mural's content and how to sensitively address any students' concerns was prepared, but it is not known if it was circulated (August 16, 1990). Benton Murals—Woodburn Hall, Accession Dean of Students Office subject files, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (2016/116.3).

³⁵ Dean Lawrence Hanks was said to have asked a student to alter his award-winning speech for a 1996 Martin Luther King Day event because he felt that it was too "Afrocentric" and that the comments might offend non-black audience members. This led to a split within IU's black community and ultimately to the dean's resignation, although he claimed that it was due to lack of resources. Jennifer Emily, "Hanks' Review Reveals Adversaries, Supporters," *Indiana Daily Student*, October 2, 1997.

³⁶ *The Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press: A Benton Mural in Woodburn Hall* (video) (Bloomington: Indiana University Radio-TV Services and Commission on Multicultural Understanding, 1998).

³⁷ As quoted by George Lyle IV, "Campus Art Unsettles," *Indiana Daily Student*, February 13, 2002.

³⁸ Reports about this event can be found in emails from Raymond Smith, Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, to Dean of Faculties Moya

Andrews, February 12, 2002, and Pamela W. Freeman, Assistant Dean of Students and Director of the Office of Student Ethics, to Dean of Students Richard McKaig, February 12, 2002. Forty people attended the first meeting and seventy the second. Freeman mentioned that she'd had only three previous complaints since 1997 (one on the Klan and two about the swastikas). After these meetings a Racial Incidents Team was formed (see their Report and Recommendations, March 12, 2002). Woodburn Mural 100, IU Commission on Multicultural Understanding records, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (C676.10).

³⁹ *Woodburn 100 Benton Mural Controversy* (video) (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2004).

⁴⁰ For a transcript of Chancellor Brehm's public statement on March 25, 2002, see Woodburn Mural 100, IU Commission on Multicultural Understanding records, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington (C676.10).

⁴¹ Asma Khalid, "Mural Program, Video Evaluated," *Indiana Daily Student*, January 21, 2003.

⁴² Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2009), 161–62, 214.

⁴³ Michael Zennie, "Herbert: Mural Should Stay," *Indiana Daily Student*, May 12, 2005.

⁴⁴ Charlie Nelms's talk was published as "Art, Diversity and Censorship: Who Decides," in *Southern Indiana Review* (Fall 2003): 50–63.

⁴⁵ Nanette Esseck Brewer, "More Than the Klan" (paper presented at the symposium, "What About the Thomas Hart Benton Murals?" March 7, 2011, Woodburn Hall Room 100).

⁴⁶ Henry Adams, "The Misguided Campaign to Remove a Thomas Hart Benton Mural," *The Conversation*, October 29, 2017, [https://theconversation.com/the-misguided-](https://theconversation.com/the-misguided-campaign-to-remove-a-thomas-hart-benton-mural-86431)

[campaign-to-remove-a-thomas-hart-benton-mural-86431](https://theconversation.com/the-misguided-campaign-to-remove-a-thomas-hart-benton-mural-86431).

⁴⁷ Jessie Benton, "My Father Painted the Truth," *Bloomington Herald-Times*, November 13, 2017; Katelyn Haas, "Daughter of Benton Muralist Defends Her Father's Artwork," *Indiana Daily Student*, December 11, 2017.

⁴⁸ "Art, Public Memory, and Racial Justice: The Case of the Benton Murals in WH100," panel sponsored by Political and Civic Engagement (PACE), Indiana University, September 28, 2017.

⁴⁹ Some of the most heated debates over the Klan panel have come from the university's black community, which hasn't always agreed on the same plan of action. Libby Grossman, "Discussion on Benton Mural in Woodburn 100 Sparks Arguments Between Panelists, Audience Members," *Indiana Daily Student*, September 29, 2017. Other racially sensitive issues, such as the removal of the name of Ora L. Wildermuth, a former IU trustee who held racist views, from the campus's intramural center, were also raised (the IU Board of Trustees voted to do so on October 5, 2018, although one trustee voted against it on the grounds of presentism).

⁵⁰ For full text of Provost Lauren Robel's statement, see Provost Statement: On the Benton Murals, Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President, Indiana University (website), September 29, 2017, <https://provost.indiana.edu/statements/archive/benton-murals.html>.

⁵¹ Since the IU Auditorium staff took over scheduling access to Woodburn 100 (January 1–October 1, 2018), there have been fifty-nine requests (sixteen for classes).