

INGERSOLL, INFIDELS, AND INDIANAPOLIS:
FREETHOUGHT AND RELIGION IN THE CENTRAL MIDWEST

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DEDICATION

For my grandmother, Martha:

“Kindness is the sunshine in which virtue grows.”

For Kalie:

“Love is the only bow on Life’s dark cloud.”

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¹ Robert G. Ingersoll, “Decoration Day Oration,” in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 9—*Political*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 419, accessed August 18, 2016, Google Books.

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ABSTRACT

R. W. Justin Clark

INGERSOLL, INFIDELS, AND INDIANAPOLIS: FREETHOUGHT AND RELIGION IN THE CENTRAL MIDWEST

During the “Golden Age of Freethought” in the United States from the 1870s to the 1910s, Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899) acted as one of its most popular and influential figures within the movement, whose supporters advocated for skepticism, science, and the separation of church and state. However, his role as a “public intellectual” has been challenged by scholars of the period, who argue that he was merely a popularizer of ideas. This conclusion does not adequately describe Ingersoll’s role within the period. Rather, Ingersoll was a synthesizer of ideas, making complex concepts of philosophy, theology, science, and history into palatable lectures and books for an eager and understanding public. As a complementary counterpoint to his role as synthesizer, he also spurred a multiplicity of responses from believers and nonbelievers alike who imbibed his ideas. As such, his role in the central Midwest, Illinois and Indiana in particular, supports his place as a public intellectual. From his public discourses with the evangelist Dwight Moody and other believers, his influence on the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, to his answers to Indianapolis clergy, Ingersoll’s experiences in the Midwest solidified his place within American history as a compelling and thoughtful public intellectual.

Philip Goff, Ph.D., Chair

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) remains one of the most influential leaders and intellectuals of “The Golden Age of Freethought” in the United States from the 1870s to the 1910s.¹ Its members advocated for skepticism, science, and the separation of church and state.² Ingersoll, a Civil War veteran, parlayed his success as a lawyer into an influential career in Republican politics, social activism, and oratory. Ingersoll served as a counterpoint to rising participation and influence of religion in government in the United States, delivering speeches to packed crowds that decried religiosity and its public entanglements. Ingersoll was also an early champion of women’s rights, influencing such early feminists as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and later ones such as Margaret Sanger.³ A growing body of scholarship on American secularism and its intellectual history habitually cites Ingersoll as one of freethought’s most significant proponents.

In this thesis, I explore Ingersoll’s historical ties to clergy and the freethought movement via his role as a critic of religious institutions, leaders, and ideas during the

¹ Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Metropolitan Press, 2004), 151.

² A great definition of freethinker comes from Ingersoll himself: “The positive side of Freethought is to find out the truth—the facts of nature—to the end that we may take advantage of those truths, of those facts—for the purpose of feeding and clothing and educating mankind.” Robert G. Ingersoll, *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 11—*Miscellany*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 396, accessed October 24, 2014, Project Gutenberg.

³ Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 117-124. For a more in-depth analysis of Ingersoll’s connection to Sanger, see Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 25, 26, 30, 135, 209.

years 1876-1899, specifically in his connection to the American Midwest.⁴ Starting with Ingersoll's 1876 "Plumed Knight" speech for presidential candidate James G. Blaine, this timeframe represents the period of Ingersoll's broadest public appeal and displays his most strident criticism of religious institutions. The era also embodied deep political and social inequalities, which Ingersoll's religious criticism targeted. My research question is: *How did Robert G. Ingersoll's criticism of religious ideas, through public debates with midwestern clergymen and support of freethought organizations, illuminate the Midwest's conceptions of religion and secularism and display his role as a public intellectual during the late nineteenth century in the United States?*

As I explored the research question, I realized something that continually bubbled to the surface about Robert G. Ingersoll: that he is not considered a serious public intellectual. Without a college education and academic credentials, Ingersoll often appears in modern scholarship as a mere "popularizer" of ideas. As scholar S.T. Joshi noted in his book *The Unbelievers*, Ingersoll "seems to me more interesting for his rhetorical gifts than for the intellectual substance of his work...."⁵ I think this a grave mistake. As will be evident in the succeeding chapters, Ingersoll's public debates with clergymen and the general public within the central Midwest demonstrates that he was a public intellectual, but not in the modern sense of being college educated and credentialed. He was a public intellectual in the same vein as the eighteenth-century

⁴ To narrow the scope of the "Midwest," I have considered what historian Raymond Gastil called the "Central Midwest," which is mostly Indiana and Illinois. For a map of this region, see Raymond Gastil, *Cultural Regions of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 29. Thanks to Dr. Nancy Robertson for her suggestions and resources on the geography of the Midwest.

⁵ S.T. Joshi, *The Unbelievers: The Evolution of Modern Atheism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011), 16.

Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume, whom historian James Harris described as a “*philosophical* man of letters, who wrote on human nature, on politics, on religion, and on the history of England from 55BC to 1688.”⁶ If as a synthesizer and popularizer of ideas for the general public, Ingersoll qualifies for the status of public intellectual.

With these considerations, a reevaluation of Ingersoll’s place within this history of freethought and secularism is necessary. Through my research, I discovered that Ingersoll’s ability to mirror and animate the positions of believers, from multiple factions of religious views, underscored his talent to engage with deep and pressing philosophical issues between believers and nonbelievers, thus reinforcing his position as a “philosophical man of letters.” In other words, Ingersoll acted as a *prism* for both believers and nonbelievers during the late nineteenth century; through his own pronouncements on god, heaven, hell, and salvation, Ingersoll compelled both his critics and celebrators to respond, either directly to him or indirectly through their own intellectual works. From the bright, white heat of Ingersoll’s religious infidelity came a rainbow of opinions, treatises, and public debates by the godless and god-fearing.

Now, a note on the markedly contrasting concepts of Ingersoll as a synthesizer of ideas as well as a prism for understanding the multitude of religious and nonreligious viewpoints during the era. As a *synthesizer* of ideas, Ingersoll engaged with the philosophical, scientific, theological, and historical literature of his time and then wrote lectures and books that engaged and entertained for the public. From there, the responses he received from his synthesizing lectures, from both fans and detractors, exhibited a

⁶ James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2. Emphasis in original.

multiplicity of religious and nonreligious ideas. Hence, the prism concept applies to the reaction to his synthesis of concepts. In other words, Ingersoll's action as popularizer and synthesizer of ideas then inspired the religious and nonreligious to react in a myriad of ways. This also affirms his place within American history as a public intellectual.

My methodology consists of a mixture between biographical, intellectual, cultural, and social historical approaches to the United States during the nineteenth century in the central Midwest. Using this multi-layered approach contextualizes and broadens the historicity of religious and intellectual life during the late nineteenth century in the United States. Studying Ingersoll illuminates one of the most misunderstood facets of American life, specifically American freethought and religious nonbelief. Ingersoll's deep connection to the Midwest allows me to concentrate on his influence in the region, which also scales down the potential enormity of the project.

Chapter one focuses on historiography, analyzing in detail the three main strands of research concerning the topic: Robert Ingersoll the man, the larger freethought movement and religious movements in which he participated, and even the larger social and intellectual context of the United States during the late nineteenth century, specifically the central Midwest. This chapter also highlights the gaps in scholarship that this thesis addresses.

Chapter two investigates the relationship between Ingersoll and religious leaders during the late nineteenth century in the central Midwest. The central figure of this chapter is the evangelist Dwight Moody, whose own brand of midwestern Christianity serves as an intellectual parallel to Ingersoll's apostasy. Understanding the theological and philosophical differences between Ingersoll's critics expands our knowledge of how

Ingersoll's own beliefs influenced the central Midwest and his role as a public intellectual.

Chapter three focuses on his influence on the freethought movement during the late nineteenth century and its impact on a local group in Indiana named the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis. Founded by the German American community within the city, the society existed for over twenty years and had open communications with other freethinkers in Milwaukee, Boston, and Philadelphia. This chapter serves as a case study in freethought in the central Midwest during the nineteenth century and how it was influenced by national organizations such as the American Secular Union, which was run for a time by Ingersoll. It also displayed the way the freethought movement in the United States fell apart by the turn of the twentieth century.

Chapter four narrows the scope, analyzing Ingersoll's interactions with clergymen in Indiana. His answers to Indianapolis clergy, published in an Indianapolis newspaper named the *Iconoclast*, displayed the "prism effect" Ingersoll had on those with differing religious beliefs. The chapter also focuses on his public dialogue with the educator Reverend John P.D. John, who publicly criticized Ingersoll's beliefs in a lecture entitled *Did Man Make God or Did God Make Man?* Ingersoll's encounters in Indiana illustrated his ability to engender a response from multiple viewpoints on the religious spectrum in the central Midwest.

Thus, answering my thesis question, Robert Ingersoll used his role as a public intellectual to engage in spirited and diverse public debates with a plurality of religious believers and nonbelievers within the Midwest. These multilayered discussions and debates illuminate our understanding of religious and intellectual diversity within the

Midwest during the late nineteenth century. This diversity manifested itself through the growing evangelical movement spurred by Dwight Moody, the bridging of rationality with spirituality advocated by John P.D. John, the competing religious views of the Indianapolis clergy, and the iconoclastic freethought of the German-American community. In emphasizing this pluralism within the Midwest and subsequently criticizing it, Ingersoll not merely popularized ideas, but deftly *synthesized* them—underscoring his role as a thinker who made complex issues of philosophy, theology, and science palatable and understandable to a public eager to hear his perspective. His impact in the freethought movement in the United States, particularly in the Midwest, cannot be ignored, any more than Dwight Moody's influence on the creation of modern evangelical Christianity or freethinker Clemens Vonnegut's influence on his great-grandson, novelist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Robert Ingersoll placed himself in the cultural and intellectual tumult of the Gilded Age with firm feet, standing tall against superstition, irrationalism, and religious extremism. As such, this thesis affirms Ingersoll's role as a public intellectual through presenting his diverse influence on believers and nonbelievers in the Midwest during the late nineteenth century.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY

Within the last generation of scholarship, interest in the nineteenth-century freethinker Robert Ingersoll and American secularism experienced a renaissance, with inspiration drawn from a century's worth of literature on America's freethought heritage and its context within religious life. The classic literature on Ingersoll and the "Golden Age of Freethought" in the United States glorified the men and women fighting for reason and human-based ethics, providing little more than a celebratory narrative.¹ Diverging from the praiseworthy interpretation, newer scholarship emphasized the cultural and intellectual influences on Ingersoll and American secularism. This chapter examines three facets of historical change: Ingersoll himself, freethought and secularism in the United States (specifically the central Midwest), and the political and religious culture of the nineteenth century. It also highlights places where scholarship is needed. In sum, Robert Ingersoll's life and work belonged squarely within the larger cultural narrative of expanding secularism and the rise of religious diversity in American life.

Ingersoll the Man

Herman Kittredge's *Ingersoll: A Biographical Appreciation* (1911) was the earliest complete biography of Robert Ingersoll. Kittredge's close relationship with Ingersoll, as an editor of the orator's complete works, provided substantial primary materials, such as Ingersoll's private correspondence and public speeches.² Kittredge's

¹ For an authoritative listing of the primary and secondary literature on Robert Ingersoll, see Gordon Stein, *Robert G. Ingersoll: A Checklist* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1969).

² Herman Kittredge, *Ingersoll: A Biographical Appreciation* (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1911), ix-x.

celebration of Ingersoll served as the connecting tissue for debunking unsettling myths. For example, contrary to clerical opinion, Robert Ingersoll's sermons contained provocative and intellectually robust arguments against the Christian religion, such as refutations of a first cause of the universe and the "God of the Bible."³ While critics derided Ingersoll as a "mere iconoclast," his defense of women's rights and racial equality embodied a philosophy "more of the truly constructive, the truly progressive, the truly ethical, than in those of any of the many other reformers who have addressed themselves to the brain and heart of the English-speaking world."⁴ Kittredge's sympathetic study gave scholars and the public a first attempt at a rich and detailed examination of Ingersoll's life.

Scholarship on Ingersoll expanded with historian C. H. Cramer's 1952 biography *Royal Bob: The Life of Robert G. Ingersoll*. Cramer argued that Ingersoll's political involvement, specifically his "Plumed Knight" speech in support of presidential candidate James G. Blaine in 1876, served to buttress his successful oratorical career.⁵ Unlike Kittredge's biography, Cramer's study fleshed out Ingersoll's childhood. The Reverend John Ingersoll (Robert's father) prominently served as an abolitionist and politically progressive Christian during the Second Great Awakening in the United States. He raised his children with the intellectual influences of William Shakespeare, the poet Robert Burns, and even the polemical French author Voltaire. While Robert Ingersoll abandoned religion, he nonetheless embraced his father's abolitionism and

³ Ibid., 258.

⁴ Ibid., 306.

⁵ C. H. Cramer, *Royal Bob: The Life of Robert G. Ingersoll* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 15-17.

progressive politics.⁶ Cramer also uncovered Ingersoll's notable clashes with Presbyterian ministers and the ceremonial burning of his published lectures, yet remained light on his interactions within the Midwest.⁷ Within the secondary literature, Cramer's research set the methodological template; Ingersoll's heretical views are placed squarely in the religious and cultural tapestry of the late nineteenth century, something future scholars emulated.⁸ Cramer's influential biography still receives mention in contemporary works on Ingersoll and the freethought movement in the nineteenth century.

Ingersoll's dedication to family, especially to his brother Ebon Clark Ingersoll, never wavered. Orvin Larson's 1962 biography *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll* highlighted this remarkable relationship and relied heavily on the brothers' correspondence as a primary source.⁹ Larson utilized Ingersoll's candid letters to his brother to describe the orator's experience in the 11th Illinois Regiment during the Civil War, from hospital conditions and tactical movements to his experiences in the battle of Shiloh.¹⁰ Larson's biography presented a more intimate version of the great freethinker than Kittredge and Cramer and emphasized his family and social circle. Larson used French journalist Paul Blouet's articles on Ingersoll's wife Eva and his two daughters to show Ingersoll's dedication to temperance (contrary to the accusation of alcoholism) and

⁶ Ibid., 18-38. This extended selection gives an in-depth look at Ingersoll's childhood.

⁷ Ibid., 153-159.

⁸ Ibid., 296.

⁹ Orvin Larson, *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll* (1962. Reprint, Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation, Inc., 1993), 294-298.

¹⁰ Ibid., 53-62.

consistent morality.¹¹ Larson also expounded on Ingersoll's intellectual influences (Shakespeare, Thomas Paine, Robert Burns), his life in the Midwest (particularly his life in Peoria, Illinois), and his place within the context of American intellectual life, a theme expanded on by later scholars Susan Jacoby and Mitchell Stevens.

While Robert Ingersoll's letters to his brother Ebon Clark unearth an intimate view, his correspondence with Illinois Governor Richard Oglesby showed his evolution as a freethinker. In 1867, Oglesby appointed Ingersoll as Illinois Attorney General and the two corresponded for over ten years.¹² Historian Mark Plummer's 1980 introduction in "'Goodbye Dear Governor. You Are My Best Friend.' The Private Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll to Richard J. Oglesby 1867-1877" described the political and philosophical evolution of Ingersoll. Not always a nonbeliever, Ingersoll's deistic beliefs began a march towards agnosticism during the era of his correspondence with Oglesby, and he described this change to the Illinois governor. For example, in an 1870 letter to Oglesby, Ingersoll cited his study of eastern religions like Hinduism as an impetus for abandoning Christianity.¹³ Plummer's article initiated a noticeable change in Ingersoll scholarship, with researchers interested more in understanding Ingersoll's beliefs, his evolution toward freethought while living in Illinois and his subsequent clash with believers in the public sphere, rather than merely chronicling his life.

¹¹ Ibid., 181-184.

¹² Mark A. Plummer and Robert G. Ingersoll, "'Goodbye Dear Governor. You Are My Best Friend.' The Private Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll to Richard J. Oglesby 1867-1877," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 73, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 78-116, accessed October 1, 2014, JSTOR.

¹³ Ibid., 87.

Building on Plummer's research, Frank Smith explored the political and legal dimensions of Ingersoll in his 1990 study *Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life*. Ingersoll's Republican Party activism helped elect six presidents between 1864 and 1896, but his favorite race came with the election of James Garfield in 1880. Garfield's strong stance on defending the separation of church and state, detailed in a letter to Ingersoll on July 9, 1880, assured the freethinker his support was not in vain.¹⁴ Class became another aspect of Ingersoll's growing political consciousness during the election of 1880. His "Wall Street" speech in October of 1880 appealed to working class farmers and their reliance on urban bankers.¹⁵ Ingersoll's politics appeared paradoxical at times, especially in his support of organized labor and the gold standard, a monetary policy not usually supported by the working class.¹⁶ These paradoxes were not the exception. Historian Worth Robert Miller's "The Lost World of Gilded Age Politics" accentuated these changing ideological landscapes within the two major political parties and noted the close electoral presidential matchups of the era.¹⁷ Overall, Smith's research presented one of the few analyses of Ingersoll's complicated political philosophy.

The evolving narrative of the Robert Ingersoll from Kittredge to Smith represented the traditional scholarship. Beginning in the twenty-first century, a scholastic resurgence of Ingersoll inspired an intellectual history approach, interested in understanding his thought and opinion. Historian Jennifer Michael Hecht's *Doubt: A*

¹⁴ Frank Smith, *Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1990), 165.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁷ Worth Robert Miller, "The Lost World of Gilded Age Politics," *Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era* 1, no. 1 (January 2002): 50-52, accessed October 1, 2014, JSTOR.

History positioned Ingersoll within a larger wave of intellectuals and writers during the nineteenth century (much like Cramer had). Hecht noted the orator's intellectual influences, especially the Greek philosopher Epicurus, on his "naturalist morality."¹⁸ Hecht also explained the intellectual kinship of Ingersoll with women's rights pioneer Margaret Sanger. Sanger, an early proponent of birth control, cited her father's freethinking and love of Ingersoll as a profound influence on her own nonbelief.¹⁹ Hecht's work, along with Susan Jacoby's, reignited scholarship on Ingersoll and skepticism.

Equally important, the eighteenth-century pamphleteer Thomas Paine left an indelible stamp on Ingersoll's skepticism and rhetorical skill. Historian and sociologist Harvey J. Kaye, in *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*, analyzed this intellectual connection. As a lifelong reader of Paine, Ingersoll expounded the virtues of Paine's open inquiry of religion with lectures throughout his career. In fact, Ingersoll dedicated his first public speech in 1856 to Thomas Paine.²⁰ The orator devoted a large portion of his own money and career to rehabilitating Paine's reputation, and in 1877 offered a \$1,000 prize for any man of faith who provided evidence of Paine's alleged religiosity at death.²¹ Ingersoll felt indebted to the enormous contributions Paine made to American life and tried his best to reignite the nation's respect for the founder. More than Hecht or future authors, Kaye brilliantly illustrated the two rationalists' intellectual partnership.

¹⁸ Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Doubt: A History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 417.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 440; see also Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 25-30.

²⁰ Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 166.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

Hecht and Kaye placed Ingersoll within the context of American intellectual life and its influences, but recent scholars emphasized the orator's rhetorical skills. Historians Eric T. Brandt and Timothy Larson applied a philosophical lens to Ingersoll's lectures in their 2011 article "The Old Atheism Revisited: Robert G. Ingersoll and the Bible." Ingersoll's central complaint with the Bible centered on the moral contradictions within the text. To bring out these contradictions, he used a "cross-examination" technique he developed as a lawyer to juxtapose the ethically problematic texts against a modern audience's sensibilities.²² Ingersoll's most famous lecture, "Some Mistakes of Moses" (1879), asked listeners to critically analyze the Old Testament's books without the aid of clergy, thereby disputing its infallibility.²³ Brandt and Larson's article evaluated Ingersoll's lectures philosophically as well as historically and gave Ingersoll his intellectual due.

Rhetoric scholar Paul Stob's 2013 analysis "Religious Conflict and Intellectual Agency: Robert Ingersoll's Contributions to America's Thought and Culture" focused on the oratorical nuances in Ingersoll's lectures. The orator's appeal to both religious and non-religious audiences intrigued Stob. How could a man with so little respect for religion engender respect with clergy and religious people? Stob argued that Ingersoll's success arose from the use of "agency."²⁴ Ingersoll challenged audiences to think for themselves and critique their own philosophies and beliefs. According to Stob, Ingersoll

²² Eric T. Brandt and Timothy Larson, "The Old Atheism Revisited: Robert G. Ingersoll and the Bible," Boston University's *Journal of the Historical Society* 11, no. 2 (June 2011): 223, accessed October 1, 2014, Wiley Online Library.

²³ *Ibid.*, 224-225.

²⁴ Paul Stob, "Religious Conflict and Intellectual Agency: Robert Ingersoll's Contributions to America's Thought and Culture," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 722, accessed October 1, 2014, EbscoHost.

never preached what to think, but *how* to think.²⁵ By using plain language and personal appeals, Ingersoll opened up his criticisms of religion to a much broader audience. Ingersoll's oratorical style also benefitted from his respect for religious individuals. His lectures chastised specific religious beliefs but rarely scandalized people. In this respect, as Stob argues, Ingersoll's complaints paralleled liberal theologians whose sermons made the same criticisms.²⁶ Stob's study of Ingersoll's accessibility underscored that the orator's technique illuminated the diverse religious beliefs of the period, yet neglected to classify him as a public intellectual.

As a culmination of a century of previous scholarship, Susan Jacoby's *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* places the orator's life within the story of American intellectual history. Jacoby's thematic approach unpacked the myriad of political, social, and religious opinions of the Great Agnostic.²⁷ Her biographical narrative derived inspiration from Cramer's *Royal Bob* and Larson's *American Infidel*, but the philosophical discussions are all her own. For example, Jacoby counters historian Richard Hofstadter's claim that Ingersoll's political ideals held with the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer.²⁸ Ingersoll did not believe in the "survival of the fittest" paradigm but subscribed to a social progressivism interested in racial and gender equality.²⁹ Jacoby's understanding of Ingersoll, though steeped in previous research, introduced a new concept: Ingersoll as humanistic forefather. Many of the social and

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 725-727.

²⁷ Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 1-2.

²⁸ Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (1944. Reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 31.

²⁹ Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic*, 109.

political movements of the 20th and 21st centuries found a welcome eye in Ingersoll's own ethical framework. It is also one of the first works to intimate that Ingersoll was indeed a public intellectual. Overall, the scholarship on Robert Ingersoll's life analyzed the personal, social, political, and intellectual layers of his life and also reinforced his place as critic of the religious culture of the period.

The Golden Age of Freethought

Robert Ingersoll's oratory and activism existed within a larger movement called the "Golden Age of Freethought," and much like Ingersoll, the literature on American secularism evolved. Sydney Warren's groundbreaking 1944 work *American Freethought, 1860-1914* spearheaded historical perspectives on secularism in the United States. Warren placed Ingersoll at the center of an organizational network advocating human reason and the scientific method. The American Secular Union, an organization born out of the failed National Liberal League, formed over 250 ancillary organizations across the country for political activism.³⁰ While the freethought movement gained considerable steam by the end of the nineteenth century, organizations like the American Secular Union were all but extinct by World War I.³¹ Warren's interpretation of the schism between the more abundant liberal freethinkers in the American Secular Union and conservative freethinkers in The Free Religious Association highlighted the chasms within even the movement itself.³² Recent literature leaned on Warren's *American Freethought* and its adept handling of the multitudinous nature of this movement. Despite

³⁰ Sydney Warren, *American Freethought, 1860-1914* (1943. Reprint, New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), 169-170.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

³² *Ibid.*, 98-116.

his successful scholarship, Warren spends less time researching the Midwest and its relationship the Freethought Movement.

Robert M. Taylor, Jr. began to explain this influence in “The Light of Reason: Hoosier Freethought and the Indiana Rationalist Association, 1909-1913,” published in 1983. The Indiana Rationalist Association, founded in 1909, also found inspiration in Ingersoll and the larger freethought movement of the nineteenth century. Ingersoll’s involvement with the American Secular Union influenced Indiana freethought organizations like the Freethinkers Society of Indianapolis and the Indiana Rationalist Association.³³ Despite their fledgling efforts, both organizations used the tools and institutional framework that freethinkers like Ingersoll established during the late nineteenth century. Taylor’s article provided an insightful case study of Ingersoll’s impact on secularism in the Midwest, yet doesn’t focus more on the years that Ingersoll was active.

Taylor’s research built on the research done on German Americans in the city of Indianapolis, specifically Theodore Stempfel’s *Festschrift: Fifty Years of Unrelenting German Aspirations in Indianapolis* and George Theodore Probst’s *The Germans in Indianapolis*. These two works comprised the foundational work on German Americans and their relationship to the city and their context within the central Midwest. Stempfel’s work chronicled the migration of Germans during the mid-nineteenth century to all areas of the United States, particularly the Midwest. It is in this work that some of the earliest historical writing on the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis materialized. The

³³ Robert M. Taylor, Jr., “The Light of Reason: Hoosier Freethought and the Indiana Rationalist Association, 1909–1913,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 79, no. 2 (June 1983): 109-111, accessed October 20, 2014, IU ScholarWorks.

Freethinker Society grew out of the Socialer Turnverein, an athletic and social club founded in 1868.³⁴ The Freethinker Society, founded on April 10, 1870, strove to “encourage the free-thinking Germans to band together and agitate through lectures, debates, and the circulation of liberal tracts, and especially to attend to the young generation.”³⁵ Stempfel’s evaluation of the Freethinker Society was respectful but honest; the group foundered after lack of engagement and a leadership whose interests shifted to other organizations.³⁶ *Festschrift* provided a strong introductory work for understanding the German Americans in Indianapolis.

Theodore Probst’s *The Germans in Indianapolis* analyzed the influence and importance of German Americans in the city and the Freethinker Society overall. Probst’s evaluation centered more on the leadership within the organization, such as founders Karl Beyschlag, Clemens Vonnegut, Hermann Lieber, and Philip Rappaport.³⁷ He also described their outspoken nature in the Indianapolis German American community as “not shy about airing their convictions,” and that they “felt strongly about maintaining their own intellectual tradition.”³⁸ A connection to a series of secular “Sunday Schools” and industrial trade school in Indianapolis reinforced this dedication to freethought as an

³⁴ Theodore Stempfel, *Festschrift: Fifty Years of Unrelenting German Aspirations in Indianapolis* (First Edition 1898. Indianapolis: German American Center and Indiana German Heritage Society, Inc., 1991), 38-39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁷ George Theodore Probst, *The Germans in Indianapolis, 1840-1918* (Indianapolis: German American Center and Indiana German Heritage Society, Inc., 1989), 70-71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

intellectual tradition.³⁹ Probst's research, unlike Stempfel's, expanded on the Freethinkers and their heritage far more than Stempfel's cursory study.

Warren's and Taylor's analyses of organized freethought complemented the ideological perspective of freethought's origins in James Turner's *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*. Turner argued that religious liberalism in the eighteenth century facilitated the rise of secularism and freethought in the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ In relation to Robert Ingersoll, the liberal theology of his Congregationalist minister father instilled a Victorian-era morality not unlike his religious peers.⁴¹ Turner also cited Darwinian evolution by natural selection as a major influence on the expansion of freethought in the United States and referred to Ingersoll as one of its strongest proponents.⁴² Turner's analysis synthesized concepts from science (Charles Darwin and Isaac Newton), literature (Ralph Waldo Emerson), and religion/freethought (John Tyndall, Robert Ingersoll) for a holistic explanation of American freethought's origins.

Turner's study of American nonbelief found a parallel in Michael Buckley's *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*. Buckley's research widened the scope of inquiry and illustrated the roots of nonbelief throughout human culture. His analysis, influenced by a background in theology and religious history, complemented Turner's secular approach. Buckley argued that atheism arose during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not as a mere rebellion against religion, but as a tradition with deep philosophical

³⁹ Ibid., 100, 110, 134.

⁴⁰ James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xiii.

⁴¹ Ibid., 221.

⁴² Ibid., 240.

underpinnings.⁴³ He emphasized western philosophers such as Rene Descartes, Denis Diderot, and Friedrich Nietzsche as transitional thinkers, who moved rationalism away from philosophical deism (a god without form or function) to affirmative atheism (no god).⁴⁴ A survey rich in philosophy and theology, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* affirmed atheism and materialism within the pantheon of global intellectual history.

An essential blending of the intellectual history of Turner and Buckley with the institutional analysis of Warren, Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (2004) provides the best one-volume account of freethought in the United States. Jacoby's approach benefitted from a new understanding of the conflict between freethought and religion in American society. Secular progress, in the form of a strong separation of church and state and growing freethought activism, faced continuous blowback from religious conservatives.⁴⁵ Robert Ingersoll encountered this opposition in the form of patronizing preachers, who smeared the orator's reputation through allegations of alcoholism (which were debunked but lingered).⁴⁶ Unlike previous historians, Jacoby described Ingersoll's influence on future freethinkers like attorney Clarence Darrow (of Scopes "Monkey Trial" fame) and socialist Eugene V. Debs. As a contextual treatment of secularism, Jacoby's *Freethinkers* excited a renewal of research on American freethought and Robert Ingersoll.

⁴³ Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 376-40.

⁴⁵ Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Metropolitan Press, 2004), 8-10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 163-165.

Ingersoll's freethought embodied the progressivism and optimism of late nineteenth-century liberal activism, but its origins traced back further. In his classic 2005 survey *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, progressive historian Sean Wilentz stressed that democracy's evolution during the first half of the nineteenth century resulted from continual reevaluations of social and political ideals.⁴⁷ Freethought's early activism, with Philadelphia's freethinker deists and nonbelievers as an example, expanded democracy as well.⁴⁸ Democratic activist William Duane inspired freethought throughout Philadelphia and, like Ingersoll, cited Thomas Paine as an influence.⁴⁹ However, Duane's activism pales in comparison to the towering influence of Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen. According to Wilentz, their political activism, newspaper publishing, and calls for educational reform in New York gave freethought one of its first organizational movements.⁵⁰ In sum, Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy* effectively unites the kindred paths of secularism and democracy.

The freethought movement in the nineteenth century also manifested itself in the legal system, and Steven Green's *The Second Disestablishment* unpacked these complex political interrelationships. The nineteenth century's "second disestablishment" represented a paradox in American life: while the religious life of the United States flourished and diversified in interpretation, the governing institutions slowly secularized, paving the way for the twentieth century's legal defense of strict secularism.⁵¹ Ingersoll's

⁴⁷ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), xxii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 352-354.

⁵¹ Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

career as an attorney crossed paths with these contradictions. In 1882, the orator defended, pro-bono, former minister then freethinker Charles B. Reynolds in a blasphemy trial. The trial became a watershed moment for Ingersoll's career, highlighting his eloquent defense of liberty of conscience. While Ingersoll's defense did not protect Reynolds from a conviction for blasphemy and a \$25 fine, the attorney's commitment to the separation of church and state helped change the legal system's position towards secularism.⁵² Green's *The Second Disestablishment* effectively interpreted the legal ramifications resulting from the clash of public religiosity and secularism.

As a complement to Green's research, David Sehat's *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* underscored a key issue with Jacoby's narrative of sheer gains and losses by freethinkers and the religious alike. Sehat argued that freethought's commitment to a completely secular culture may have gone counter to some of the complex and often contradictory national policies regarding religion during the nineteenth century. As he noted, "this connection between Protestant Christianity's moral code and state power was commonplace throughout much of U.S. history."⁵³ In the middle of this storm was Ingersoll, whose own moral individualism had radicalized him against religious encroachment on public life. Sehat argued that Ingersoll deeply believed that "the forward movement of the nineteenth century necessarily meant the secularization of the world and the reeducation of individuals to rely on themselves rather than on an 'aristocracy of the air.'"⁵⁴ This individualism, central to Ingersoll's

⁵² Ibid., 352.

⁵³ David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 173-174.

freethought, emerged as a key component of midwestern secularism, as a foil to religious value systems. Overall, Sehat's research suggested that the lines between the sacred and the profane in American public life are deeply blurred, and Ingersoll's strict lines within that grey area set him apart as an integral figure to the late nineteenth century.

As an important theoretical aside to understanding nineteenth century freethought, social movement theory explained some of the ways in which secular movements did not achieve equal social status with the religious. Sociologist John D. McCarthy and physician Mark Wolfson, in their article "Consensus Movements, Conflict Movements, and the Cooperation of Civic and State Infrastructures," argued that aligning with social and political institutions is often predicated on differences between conflict and consensus movements.⁵⁵ Conflict movements, which freethought could be described as, "are typically supported by minorities or slim majorities of populations and confront fundamental, organized opposition in attempting to bring about social change."⁵⁶ By contrast, consensus movements usually received support from a majority of a population and little to no opposition from the majority.⁵⁷ As Green and Sehat's research argues, religious movements during the late nineteenth century qualified for the consensus movement status whereas freethought and secularist movements were conflict movements who received little favor from the larger political and cultural zeitgeist. When applying McCarthy and Wolfson's framework, freethought and secularism's lack of

⁵⁵ John D. McCarthy and Mark Wolfson, "Consensus Movements, Conflict Movements, and the Cooperation of Civic and State Infrastructures," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 273.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 273-274.

cultural hegemony, or what the authors call “cooptation,” stemmed from an individualism and varied social convictions that divided their goals.⁵⁸ As the research from Warren through Stephens reaffirmed, the freethought movement’s conflict movement status never pulled it from cultural and intellectual obscurity during the late nineteenth century. Leaders like Ingersoll tended to be the exception, not the rule.

Diverging from the political and sociological, some research reinforced freethought’s commitment to science and secular values and how it helped expand women’s rights during the late nineteenth century. Kimberly Hamlin’s *From Eve To Evolution* explains these radical transformations. In relation to Robert Ingersoll, women’s suffrage activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a lifelong rationalist and science supporter, befriended Ingersoll’s wife Eva and Benjamin Franklin Underwood, a Darwin proponent.⁵⁹ Another successful woman dedicated to freethought and science education was Helen Hamilton Gardner, whose friendship with Robert Ingersoll inspired her own lectures on science and feminism.⁶⁰ According to Hamlin, Gardner, Stanton, and the Ingersoll family saw a direct line from rationalism to scientism and feminism and believed that the progress of women connected to the abandonment of fundamentalist religious belief. Hamlin’s history of science background and use of writings by Darwin, Stanton, and Gardner made *From Eve to Evolution* a relevant look into feminism’s connection to freethought.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 285-287.

⁵⁹ Kimberly A. Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women’s Rights in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 51.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 78.

These general studies of freethought examined the political, cultural, and legal nuances of the nineteenth century in the United States, but Mitchell Stephens' *Imagine There's No Heaven* provided an analysis of atheism and freethought over 2,000 years of western civilization. Stephens' argument rested on the defense of atheism as a progressive ideal, a philosophy that expanded knowledge, technology, and human rights.⁶¹ Like Kaye, Stephens acknowledged the eighteenth-century pamphleteer Thomas Paine and his work *The Age of Reason* as a strong influence on the nineteenth-century freethought movement.⁶² His chapter covering Ingersoll presented a new interpretation of the orator's lectures: Ingersoll's prescience on the decline of church attendance in the United States. Stephens referenced Ingersoll's 1872 lecture "The Gods" and noted the Great Agnostic's anticipation of declining religious affiliation in America (a trend made real by the mid-twentieth century).⁶³ The scope of *Imagine There's No Heaven* limited its depth, but the synthesis of freethought throughout history makes the work an essential secondary source in contemporary scholarship.

The Political and Religious Culture of the Nineteenth Century

American freethought found both successes and challenges during an era of immense economic and social changes, and the third theme of research addressed these complexities. Many occurred during Reconstruction, a swath of political reforms that attempted to rebuild the country after the disastrous effects of the Civil War. Historian Eric Foner analyzed the impact of these reforms in his 1988 study *Reconstruction:*

⁶¹ Mitchell Stephens, *Imagine There's No Heaven: How Atheism Helped Create the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 144-145.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 253.

America's Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877. A strengthened national government, dedicated to free labor and an expansion of equality, epitomized the goals of Reconstruction, but southern animosity and government localization squelched any chances of a full-scale political revolution.⁶⁴ Like C. H. Cramer, Foner referenced Ingersoll's 1876 "Plumed Knight" speech for presidential candidate James G. Blaine as a catalyst for his successful speaking career.⁶⁵ Blaine's failed attempt at the presidency ensured the Republican nomination of Rutherford B. Hayes, whose election ended the ambitious reforms of Reconstruction.⁶⁶ Even though political enfranchisement of African Americans and the working class expanded during this era, true political equality languished for decades. Ingersoll's success as an orator came from his defense of Blaine, but the progressive ideals he promoted were relegated to rhetoric for a least a generation.

Like Foner, historian Craig Calhoun's article "New Social Movements of the Early Nineteenth Century" additionally placed freethought within a larger community dedicated to political and social equality. Freethought, according to Calhoun, significantly benefitted from the anti-clerical and liberal religious movements of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ The social theory of philosopher Jurgen Habermas influenced Calhoun's study, especially with the theoretical framework of "welfare state as utopia."⁶⁸ Utopia also pervaded the emergence of liberal Christianity in the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by Ira Mandelker's *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century*

⁶⁴ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877* (1988. Reprint, New York: History Book Club, 2005), xxvi.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 567.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 586-587.

⁶⁷ Craig Calhoun, "New Social Movements of the Early Nineteenth Century," *Social Science History* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 392, accessed October 1, 2014, JSTOR.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

America. A commune founded on the theology of John Humphrey Noyes, the Oneida community in upstate New York from the 1848 to 1881 served as the case study.⁶⁹ Attempting to create a literal heaven on Earth, the Oneida community failed under the weight of theological squabbling and misappropriation of resources.⁷⁰ Oneida's dissolution defied the rule; many religious movements did not suffer the same fate.

The Reverend Dwight L. Moody served as a counterpoint to the oratorical success of Robert Ingersoll and James Findlay's *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist* (1969) provided a thorough one-volume biography of the nineteenth-century evangelist. Rising from his childhood of poverty in rural Illinois, Moody became one of the most successful Christian orators of the late nineteenth century, presenting sold-out lectures across the United States and Europe.⁷¹ Moody's view of secularism appeared cautious at best, terrified at worst. He also believed the United States' status as a "Christian Nation" faced a formidable challenge in the growing tide of secularism. As a rebuttal, Moody's sermons criticized the divide between his strain of evangelical Protestantism and the growing religious diversity of the United States and his home city of Chicago.⁷² Moody's evangelicalism was exactly the religious culture that Ingersoll (also an Illinoisan) experienced, sometimes even directly.

Yet, Moody did not stay in Chicago for all of his life, and in fact, his fame grew from his lectures across Europe. In *God's Man for the Gilded Age: D. L. Moody and the*

⁶⁹ Ira Mandelker, *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 108-109.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 134-156.

⁷¹ James F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 164-191, 192-226.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 297.

Rise of Modern Mass Evangelicalism, historian Bruce Evensen argued that Moody's most important success was exactly the same as Ingersoll's: oratory. By 1875, through a growing evangelical movement in Great Britain and a network of theological surrogates, Moody became the most influential evangelist in the English-speaking world. To Evensen, this success resulted from an organizational zeal that took precedence over theatrics. As he noted, "Moody's meetings were a businessman's Bible camp for believers and those anxious over the condition of their souls."⁷³ Like Ingersoll, Moody greatly benefitted from a Gilded Age, one that appreciated spectacle and equipped with sympathetic journalists.⁷⁴ Ingersoll's oratorical success at the 1876 Republican National Convention mirrored Moody's British evangelical crusade. For both of them, their medium was their words, and the public ate them up regardless of their own particular religious beliefs.

While Moody's version of Christianity gave believers a traveling, evangelical religion, a majority of Christians displayed their faith in the home. Religious historian Colleen McDannell's *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, represented the evolving scholarship on the interplay between religion and society in the nineteenth century. McDannell argued that Christian Protestantism created an entrenched view of women, one of isolation, genuflection, and subservience to men.⁷⁵ Exceptions did exist, such as liberal Christianity's alignment with love and equality facilitating maternal views

⁷³ Bruce J. Evensen, *God's Man for the Gilded Age: D. L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelicalism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003), 46.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁵ Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 1-7.

of the household.⁷⁶ Religion in the Victorian home personified the interrelationships between theology and modernization, with science nudging religion in a new direction. *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century* by religious scholar Craig James Hazen analyzed these changes, using his own theoretical framework of the “Village Enlightenment.” He argued that liberal religion during the Victorian era placed its evolving religious beliefs within traditional Enlightenment beliefs in science, human reason, and progress.⁷⁷ McDannell and Hazen’s interpretations of religious liberalization countered Findlay’s view of Moody’s evangelicalism, one lacking acceptance of modernism.

Moody’s success, like Ingersoll’s, occurred during a reconfiguration of religious life in the United States. *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* by historians Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt included a chapter about such changes. The economic and social upheaval of the nineteenth century caused a reevaluation of religious life in the United States, especially after the growth of immigration and industrialization.⁷⁸ Religious institutions during this period responded to social ills in unprecedented ways. Quaker activist Jane Addams founded Hull House, a social settlement dedicated to healthcare and education for women and children.⁷⁹ Catholic James Cardinal Gibbons defended the working class as an

⁷⁶ Ibid., 127-149.

⁷⁷ Craig James Hazen, *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 5-14.

⁷⁸ Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 232.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 236.

activist for the Knights of Labor and lobbied for child labor laws.⁸⁰ The evangelicalism of Moody ran straight up against this new tide of progressivism, resulting in religious disintegration.

Mark Twain, one of the nation's most successful writers and speakers, also faced the same competing beliefs of evangelicalism, liberalism, and freethought during the late nineteenth century. In *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age*, literary historian Harold K. Bush contextualized Twain's position in America's evolving religious beliefs. German analytic philosophy (Nietzsche) and Darwinian evolution, Bush noted, precipitated the intense religious changes that Twain responded to.⁸¹ Twain's own criticism of religion, in works such as *Letters from the Earth*, illustrated an ambivalent feeling towards fundamentalism on any level, either from secularism or religion. He always sought the middle ground.⁸² Bush also emphasized the close relationship between Twain and Ingersoll. Twain's admiration of Ingersoll came from a mutual respect for the rhetorical vigor of Abraham Lincoln and open inquiry of all matters religious and supernatural.⁸³ Thus, the ambiguities surrounding Twain's own religious beliefs, according to Bush, spoke to a larger truth about the religious upheaval of his time.

These interpretations surfaced in the research of Rutgers University historian Jackson Lears, in his 2009 work *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*. Victorian-era religion found itself upended by an influx of immigrants, mostly Roman Catholic and Jewish, many of whom brought new views of faith to the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 241.

⁸¹ Harold K. Bush, *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 3.

⁸² Ibid., 277.

⁸³ Ibid., 278.

United States. Discrimination by native-born Americans became a typical experience for immigrants, mostly in public places.⁸⁴ On the liberal end of religion, the “Social Christianity” movement from 1870 to 1900 offered “alternatives to the laissez faire” economics such as welfare socialism and alcohol temperance.⁸⁵ The proposed reforms of activists like Indiana-native Frances Willard and the Reverend George Herron did not happen overnight; in fact, many reforms were not enacted until the 1910s or 1920s. Nevertheless, the Gilded Age (1870 to 1901) produced a liberal spirituality dedicated to an enlightened, progressive world, much like the parallel ideals of freethinkers throughout the United States.

Historian of Indiana James H. Madison, in *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, suggested that the religious in Indiana rejected the social gospel theory as much as other sectors of the country.⁸⁶ Unlike the social reforms of, say, Chicago and New York, the big trend in late nineteenth century Christianity in Indiana was the Sunday school. As Madison notes, “by 1898 there were 5,617 Sunday schools with 500,000 scholars reciting Bible verses, singing hymns, and studying uniform lessons.”⁸⁷ Methodism became the largest Protestant denomination during the period, but there was also a growing Catholic population as well, particularly in the northern city of South Bend.⁸⁸ The only key social concerns for Indiana Christians during the era were “personal morality, temperance, and

⁸⁴ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 98.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 195-200.

⁸⁶ James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 207.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

the Sabbath....”⁸⁹ Ironically, Ingersoll’s commitment to stressing personal morality actually echoes many of the religious leaders throughout the period, particularly in the Midwest. Madison’s research on religion adds further evidence to support this rather multifaceted view of midwestern freethinkers.

Conclusion

Overall, the secondary literature on Robert Ingersoll, American freethought, and the late nineteenth century evolved from narrative history to social and intellectual history and explained the complex trends throughout religious and non-religious life in America. Biographical works on Ingersoll emphasized the intellectual, moral, and political aspects of the great orator and placed his legacy firmly within the progressive tradition. American freethought, once a topic of derision for religious conservatives, flourished by the late nineteenth century and proposed a moral and social alternative to religion. Reconstruction and the Gilded Age embodied a rational and liberal approach for solving society’s ills, all the while facing strong opposition from religious evangelicals. In other words, all three strands of research explained the ideological and social diversity of the United States and the central Midwest during the late nineteenth century, and how Ingersoll and freethinkers faced both victories and setbacks amid a deeply religious and moralistic culture. It also reinforced the assumption that Ingersoll’s own religious criticism inspired many religious and non-religious communities to respond to his ideas.

However, these three strands of scholarship do not firmly place Ingersoll in the camp of the public intellectual, with the exception of Jacoby’s introductory research. They also do not emphasize the ways in which being a Midwesterner influenced both

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Ingersoll's de-conversion from religion and his role as clerical critic, particularly his life in Illinois. Therefore, the next three chapters highlight these gaps in scholarship as well as demonstrate Ingersoll's place in American history as a public intellectual in the Midwest and his role as "prism" for the religious and non-religious during the late nineteenth century.

CHAPTER TWO: ROBERT INGERSOLL AND DWIGHT MOODY:
“INVITATION TO THE DANCE”

Introduction

Writing a generation removed from the Golden Age of Freethought, the journalist and cultural critic H. L. Mencken reflected on the state of American secularism in his essay, “Invitation to the Dance.” “What this grand, gaudy, unapproachable country needs and lacks is an Ingersoll,” Mencken quipped.¹ He may have been on to something. After the First World War, freethought and secularism took a backseat to national unity and public faith.² Mencken, an iconoclast in his own right, wrote of the days in which religion was more openly criticized in the public square, during the age of Robert Green Ingersoll. Ingersoll, America’s most regarded popularizer of freethought and secularism, needed an heir apparent, at least in Mencken’s eyes. However, Mencken also understood Ingersoll’s intellectual foils and their impact on American life. “Moreover, a high tide of evangelistic passion was running,” writes Mencken, “it was the day of Dwight L. Moody, of the Salvation Army, of prayer-meetings in the White House, of eager chapel building on every suburban dump.”³ Moody, evangelical minister and founder of the Chicago Evangelization Society (known later as the Moody Bible Institute), was Ingersoll’s ecclesiastical parallel. Both came from Illinois (Ingersoll called Peoria home, Chicago for

¹ H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Series*, ed. Marion Elizabeth Rodgers (New York: Library of America, 2010), 525.

² Sydney Warren, *American Freethought, 1860-1914* (1943. Reprint, New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), 169-170.

³ Mencken, 527.

Moody), were extremely gifted speakers, and possessed a moralistic passion that guided their lives and their intellectual crusades.

In some respects, Mencken's short essay illuminated the central divide occurring at the end of the nineteenth century in America life, with Ingersoll as the voice of reason and science and Moody the champion of faith and revelation. Yet, their lives shared powerful similarities that speak to a larger consensus on what it meant to come from the Midwest during the late nineteenth century. This chapter analyzes their lives through the lens of a collision between their interests, with Robert Ingersoll as a public intellectual advocating for freethought and Dwight Moody as a public evangelist advocating for Christianity. As such, it shows how both men used their public platforms to advance their shared conviction of moral individualism while criticizing each other's worldview. This chapter also reinforces the "prism" concept outlined in the introduction: Ingersoll's iconoclastic religious ideas compelled a multiplicity of religious responses, with Moody being one of the most successful. Furthermore, this chapter fills gaps in scholarship, for Ingersoll and Moody's public interactions are only given cursory notice in previous studies, as indicated in chapter one.

Ingersoll and Moody: Two Illinoisans

Robert Green Ingersoll came into the world on August 11, 1833. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Ingersoll grew up with a tender father who instilled a keen sense of education. "My father [The Reverend John Ingersoll] was one of the most affectionate of men," Ingersoll wrote to S.C. Windsor in 1887, "and in his treatment of his children was

kindness itself.”⁴ He also wrote that his father believed “that his children should think and investigate for themselves. He taught me to be intellectually honest.”⁵ In this atmosphere, young Ingersoll read the Bible as well as poet Robert Burns, William Shakespeare, Voltaire, and the British-American Revolutionary and Deist Thomas Paine, who was a profound influence on the young skeptic. Years later, he would write that, “The people of this country are hardly civilized enough, as yet, to appreciate the services of that great man.”⁶ Paine’s own religious criticism, particularly his two-part pamphlet *The Age of Reason*, impacted Ingersoll’s thought concerning the Bible and Christianity.

After many years of moving around with his father, who himself was reaping the rewards of the America’s religious revivalism known as the “Second Great Awakening,” Ingersoll finally settled in Peoria, Illinois, with his brother Ebon Clark in 1858. Shortly thereafter, the two began their law practice.⁷ His years in Illinois proved to be significant for Ingersoll, who solidified his own religious skepticism and practice of law. For much of the 1850s and 1860s, Ingersoll subscribed to a type of liberal religious deism, one that saw god as an “infinite being who created and preserves the universe” but not necessarily in line with specific tenets of Christianity.⁸ Ingersoll, channeling the deism of Voltaire and Thomas Paine, believed in an impersonal God that did not intervene in human affairs.

⁴ Robert G. Ingersoll to S.C. Windsor, November 9, 1887, in Robert G. Ingersoll, *The Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll*, ed. Eva Ingersoll Wakefield (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1951), 293.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert G. Ingersoll to Isaac H. Julian, Esq., July 18 1892, in Ibid., 335.

⁷ Orvin Larson, *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll* (1962. Reprint, Madison: Freedom from Religion Foundation, Inc., 1993), 39.

⁸ Robert G. Ingersoll to General Charles H. T. Collis, February 15, 1893, in Ingersoll, *The Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll*, 342; Larson, *American Infidel*, 75-77.

Peoria during the nineteenth century was a bustling city with many new economic and political openings. Ingersoll biographer Orvin Larson described the city as a “thriving port on the Illinois River” that desperately needed lawyers for all the legal hurdles created by the railroad boom, which Robert and brother Ebon Clark took advantage of.⁹ As the second largest city in the state with some 15,000 residents, Peoria’s rich farmland and increasingly diverse community was a perfect fit for Ingersoll.¹⁰ It was in Peoria that he found his wife, his career as a lawyer, and an atmosphere of free inquiry that allowed him to further explore ideas he had played with since childhood.¹¹ As such, Ingersoll’s home encompassed a “large and happy family which was regarded by everyone, whether devout or infidel, as a model of domesticity.”¹²

As mentioned above, Ingersoll’s experiences in Peoria pushed him towards his later agnosticism. Of these were two major factors: his service in the Civil War and his marriage to Eva Parker. Ingersoll mustered into the 11th Regiment of the Illinois Volunteer Cavalry on December 20, 1861, as a colonel (a title both he and the press used for the rest of his life). An adept military leader, Ingersoll fought in the battle of Shiloh and was later appointed Chief of Cavalry for Brigadier General Jeremy C. Sullivan on December 2, 1862. This appointment was short lived; after only sixteen days, Ingersoll

⁹ Larson, *American Infidel*, 39.

¹⁰ Frank Smith, *Robert G. Ingersoll: A Life* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1990), 24.

¹¹ By the 1850s and 1860s, multiple forms of Protestantism established roots in Peoria, from Methodism and Presbyterianism (Ingersoll’s family faith) to Episcopalianism. For more on the religious diversity of Peoria, see a contemporary account in Charles Ballance, *The History of Peoria, Illinois* (Peoria: N.C. Nason, 1870), 102-119, accessed July 16, 2016, Google Books.

¹² C. H. Cramer, *Royal Bob: The Life of Robert G. Ingersoll* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 60.

was captured by troops led by Nathan Bedford Forrest and spent four days in a prisoner of war camp. He formally left the service on June 30, 1863, but intellectually he was as far away from the carnage as possible.¹³ As he wrote years later in *How to Reform Mankind*, “No man has imagination enough to paint the agonies, the horrors, the cruelties of war.”¹⁴ Furthermore, he saw these cruelties as tied to religion, particularly Christianity: “The religion of Jesus Christ, as preached by his church, causes war, bloodshed, hatred, and all uncharitableness....”¹⁵ These experiences shaped Ingersoll’s view of war and its relationship to religion.

The other prominent influence on his freethought was his wife, Eva Parker. They met in the winter of 1862 and were married on February 13 of that year. Parker came from a long line of rationalists and freethinkers; her grandmother was a known skeptic, and like Ingersoll, she was exposed to Voltaire and Thomas Paine.¹⁶ Still, it took Ingersoll years to finally abandon any religious inclinations. When he did, he understood that his study of theology, history, and politics had informed his decision to abandon it, but also the kindness and generosity of his wife. He would dedicate his lecture, “The Gods,” to Eva, whom he called a “woman without superstition.”¹⁷

If Ingersoll had any religious beliefs after the Civil War, they were all but gone by the time he wrote one of his first freethought lectures, “Humboldt,” published in 1869. In

¹³ Ibid., 47-54.

¹⁴ Robert G. Ingersoll, “How to Reform Mankind,” *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 4—*Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), 126.

¹⁵ Robert G. Ingersoll, “Orthodoxy,” *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 2—*Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), 380.

¹⁶ Larson, *American Infidel*, 51-52.

¹⁷ Robert G. Ingersoll, “The Gods,” *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 1—*Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), iii.

it, he praised the German naturalist who “formed the great purpose of presenting to the world a picture of Nature, in order that men might, for the first time, behold the face of their Mother.”¹⁸ He also gave a full-throated defense of human reason and science against superstition, declaring that, “Superstition has always been the relentless enemy of science; faith has been a hater of demonstration; hypocrisy has been sincere only in its dread of truth, and all religions are inconsistent with mental freedom.”¹⁹ By the time he published his seminal lecture, “The Gods,” in 1872, Ingersoll stood forth against the world as the nonbeliever and infidel the preachers would excoriate from the pulpit.²⁰ His time in Peoria gave Ingersoll the resources and intellectual framework needed to eventually become one of the most prominent orators of the late nineteenth century.

However, he was not the only one that Illinois was good to. Dwight Lyman Moody, celebrated evangelist and orator, crystallized his career through the churches in Chicago. Born on February 5, 1837 in Northfield, Massachusetts, Moody lacked the educational abilities that Ingersoll gained from his father. Moody’s father had died when he was very young, which required his mother to work and send young Moody off to boardinghouses for work. Because he received some religious instruction in Unitarianism, Moody did not fully accept Christianity until his fateful move to Boston when he was 17. In 1855, Moody accepted Christ as his lord and savior under the tutelage

¹⁸ Robert G. Ingersoll, “Humboldt,” *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 1—*Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), 99.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁰ Robert G. Ingersoll, “The Gods,” *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 1—*Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), 7-90. In this lecture, Ingersoll rejected the Bible as a credible source of revealed wisdom and argued that Gods were created by nations, or as he put it, “always resembled his [God’s] creators” (*Ibid.*, 7.).

of his Sunday school teacher, Edward Kimball. A year later, Moody was on a train to Chicago.²¹

Chicago during Moody's time was even more booming and diverse than Peoria. By the mid-1860s, the city had reached 100,000 citizens; by Moody's return from Europe in 1876, it had grown to 400,000.²² Of these inhabitants, nearly half were immigrants, mostly consisting of "Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians." Many residents also faced unemployment or underemployment, especially the foreign-born population. The social and economic inequities influenced Moody's burgeoning revivalism and cemented his ability to speak effectively to massive crowds, made of both rich or poor, native or foreign (at least to those who had learned English).²³ To Moody, his work to save souls in the Midwest's biggest city was never done.

Dwight Moody initially entered Chicago as a businessman, eager to make money as a shoe salesman.²⁴ However, after a few years volunteering in some of Chicago's most distressed areas, Moody decided that evangelizing for Christ would be his chosen career.²⁵ As historian August J. Fry argues, "by the time of the founding of the Illinois Street Church in 1863 the greater part of Moody's theological position was more or less

²¹ James F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 26-53; J. C. Pollack, *Moody: A Biographical Portrait of the Pacesetter in Modern Mass Evangelism* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1963), 17.

²² Darrell M. Robertson, *The Chicago Revival, 1876: Society and Revivalism in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1989), 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9, 43-46; Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody*, 56-58.

²⁴ August J. Fry, *D. L. Moody: The Chicago Years, 1856-1871* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1984), 15.

²⁵ Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 222.

fixed, [by] virtue of the very gathering of the church itself.”²⁶ Moody’s involvement in the creation of branches of the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) in Chicago became a key component of his evangelicalism. “Moody changed the Y.M.C.A. from a group of frightened business men, praying for their tottering fortunes, to a society for the evangelization of the city [of Chicago].”²⁷ As a component of his social missions with the Y.M.C.A., Moody also cemented his theology during his years in the Midwest, one more personal and enthusiastic than past traditions of Christianity. This personal Christianity celebrated “a belief that God is involved in the cares of men, a profound conviction that God has taken an interest in each individual.”²⁸ Moody’s Christianity, much like Ingersoll’s freethought, centered on individualism, which they gleaned from their experiences in Illinois.

Also like Ingersoll, Moody’s oratorical career exploded during the 1860s and 1870s, with religious revivals all over Great Britain, preaching to crowds numbering in the thousands. During the spring of 1875, over 2.5 million people attended Moody’s sermons in Greater London.²⁹ Now equipped with an organizational zeal gained from his experiences with the Y.M.C.A. and a new evangelizing partner, songwriter Ira D. Sankey, Moody returned to Chicago in 1876 as a national figure. He built a new church, named by the press as the “Moody Tabernacle,” and reignited his sermonizing in the city. He also created a network of nearly 100 churches that disseminated his religious

²⁶ Fry, *D. L. Moody: The Chicago Years*, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁹ Bruce J. Evensen, *God’s Man for the Gilded Age: D. L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelicalism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003), 43.

materials and urged citizens to attend his sermons.³⁰ By the time his Chicago campaign ended in January of 1877, Moody had reached approximately one million people, with nearly a third seeing him “in the revival’s final month.”³¹ Moody became a formidable figure in American Protestantism during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. His sermons reignited the revivalism and pageantry of the Second Great Awakening while infusing the newfound “social gospel” of his own period.³² His mantle as “America’s evangelist” would be unchallenged for decades.

Without their experiences and successes in Illinois, the lives of Robert Ingersoll and Dwight Moody could have been very different. Both came from modest beginnings and little formal education to become two of the nineteenth century’s most popular and influential public intellectuals. As such, it was inevitable that the two men would connect, either in person or in the press. The latter became true. Moody and Ingersoll likely never met, but the two men’s similarities in style and ethic permeated their public debates in pamphlets and in the press. The rest of this chapter will highlight a few, seminal instances of their public relationship that underscored the clashes, and similarities, of their worldviews during the Gilded Age.

Moody’s “Heaven” and Ingersoll’s “Hell”

There is a story that, while apocryphal, illustrated the theological differences between Dwight Moody and Robert Ingersoll. A young newsboy selling his wares in a train car offered to passersby one of Robert Ingersoll’s newest lectures in pamphlet form, entitled “Hell.” Reverend Moody, seated in the car, spotted the young boy selling the

³⁰ Ibid., 136-144.

³¹ Ibid., 156.

³² Findlay, Jr., *Dwight Moody*, 3.

celebrated infidel's lecture and said to him, "Here my lad, here's another book; give them that at the same time."³³ The boy took them, apparently eager to sell both, and shouted, "Ingersoll *On Hell*; Moody on *Heaven!*"³⁴ While this story may be steeped in Moody lore, the two men did publish these lectures, with Moody publishing *Heaven* in 1880 and Ingersoll publishing *Hell* in 1882.³⁵ In these lectures, Moody and Ingersoll displayed their usual wit and biting criticism of their opponents, but also examined the implications of their worldviews against a backdrop of criticism.

The opening sentence of *Heaven* directly addressed the weariness about the afterlife that skeptics like Ingersoll pronounced. "A great many persons," declared Moody, "imagine that anything said about heaven is only a matter of speculation. They talk about heaven like the air."³⁶ To Moody, the skepticism of Ingersoll could be countered with the word of scripture. "What the Bible says about heaven, is just as true as what it says about everything else," Moody exclaimed. "It is inspired. What we are taught about heaven could not have come to us in any other way but by inspiration."³⁷ Since Moody believed that the word of the Bible was written "with more than human skill," it should be acknowledged as the final word on all things Heaven. To do anything else

³³ Richard K. Curtis, *They Called Him Mister Moody* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 310; William R. Moody, *D. L. Moody* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1988), 422.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Col. Robert G. Ingersoll, *Hell: Warm Words on the Cheerful and Comforting Doctrine of Eternal Damnation* (London: Watts & Co., 1882), accessed May 19, 2016, Google Books; D.L. Moody, *Heaven; Where It Is; Its Inhabitants; and How to Get There* (Chicago: F.H. Revell, 1880), accessed May 19, 2016, Google Books.

³⁶ Moody, *Heaven*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

pushed followers away from the teachings of Christianity and rendered their faith null. They would have succumbed to the skepticism of freethinkers like Ingersoll.

Moody developed this point further in a subsequent passage:

There is nothing in the Bible that is not wise, and there is nothing in it that is not good. If the Bible had anything in it that was opposed to reason, or to our sense of right, then, perhaps, we might think that it was like all the books in the world that are written merely by Men. [...] There is nothing at all in the Bible that does not conform to common sense.³⁸

This argument was known as “supernatural rationalism,” which believed that the claims of the Bible aligned with human reason and God’s revelation in nature.³⁹ Ingersoll, in his parallel lecture *Hell*, fiercely countered this argument, arguing that “Whenever a man appeals to a miracle he tells what is not true. Truth relies upon reason, and the undeviating course of all the laws of nature.”⁴⁰ While Moody argued for a supernatural universe with celestial guardians, Ingersoll showed the errors of reasoning or bad premises within Moody’s arguments. In other words, they both acted within a point-counterpoint structure, which highlighted Ingersoll’s role as a public intellectual.

Moody believed that Heaven resided above all mankind, timeless and immortal; to him, it would outlast all the great cities, even those built under the banner of Christendom.⁴¹ Learning these revelations compelled Moody to pray upward, and when an “infidel” asked him why, he responded with, “The spirit of God is everywhere, but God is in heaven, and heaven is above our heads. It does not matter what part of the globe

³⁸ Ibid., 8.

³⁹ Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Utilitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955), 135

⁴⁰ Ingersoll, *Hell*, 4.

⁴¹ Moody, *Heaven*, 14.

we may stand upon, heaven is above us.”⁴² Responding to “skeptics” and “infidels” was a common practice for Moody, who often regaled his readers and audiences with stories about changing the mind of a skeptic or infidel or directly answering their questions with Biblical “truths.” In that sense, Moody was just as much of a provocateur as Ingersoll; he delighted in answering his critics and rebuffing their claims.

After discussing its location, Moody described the “inhabitants” of heaven. “The society of heaven will be select,” exclaimed Moody. “No one who studied Scripture can doubt that. There are a good many kinds of aristocracy in this world, but the aristocracy of heaven will be the aristocracy of holiness.”⁴³ As such, “Christ is there; God, the Father, is there; and many, many that were dear to us that lived on earth are there—and we shall be with them by and by.”⁴⁴ This “aristocracy of holiness,” in Moody’s view, was comprised of those whose souls were “resurrected in Christ.”⁴⁵ A person who had not accepted Jesus Christ as their savior should not be allowed in; otherwise, God’s justice was imperfect. As Moody wrote, “I believe in the justice of God, too; and I think heaven would be a good deal worse than this earth if an unrenewed man were permitted to go into it.”⁴⁶ The delineation between divine and earthly justice embodied Moody’s version of Evangelical Protestantism, one steeped in a faith tradition that viewed all earthly elements as corruptible and fragile.⁴⁷

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁷ In a later passage, Moody emphasizes this point: “We all know that happiness cannot be found on earth. Reason, revelation and the experience of six thousand years, all tell us that” (Ibid., 40).

As a demonstration of Moody's own moral proclivities, he believed that "no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven."⁴⁸ Temperance was extremely popular during the late nineteenth century among the religious, particularly evangelical Protestants. Moody helped the temperance movement through revivals, but counter to prominent reformers of the period like Frances Willard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, believed that saving souls was more important than getting them to abstain from alcohol. In his reasoning, when a person gave their life to Christ, the need for "reform" dwindled, as they were consequently aided in abandoning vice by God. This made him both a staple of the movement but a cautious guide, eager to help them spiritually but reluctant to use government to install social change.⁴⁹ This mirrored Ingersoll's own view of temperance; he rarely drank but remained skeptical of government limitations or bans of alcohol.⁵⁰

A major component of Moody's evangelism that paralleled Ingersoll's own beliefs was a commitment to individualism. Moody underscored his own faith with a belief in the power of the individual to create a path of their own, but still within the boundaries of Christianity. For example, Moody described how one lives as a champion of Christ but also of themselves:

Now if you put a piece of iron in the fire, it very soon loses its dark color, and becomes red and hot like the fire, but it does not lose its iron nature: So the soul becomes bright with God's brightness, beautiful with God's beauty, pure with God's purity, and warm with the glow of his perfect

⁴⁸ Ibid., 33

⁴⁹ For more on these nuances, see Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody*, 281-283.

⁵⁰ For more on Ingersoll's view of temperance, see Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 122.

love, and yet remains a human soul. *We shall be like Him, but remain ourselves.*⁵¹

In Moody's estimation, a person's duty to God became a duty to themselves. Living purely off the grace of God was not enough; one had to cultivate their own righteousness. "By His grace and your own co-operation [sic] your soul is being gradually developed into a more perfect resemblance of him."⁵² Moody expanded this concept in a later lecture, *Sowing and Reaping*, which Ingersoll also criticized.

Moody's emphasis on individualism came from two key components: a religious ideal and social/political ideal. With the religious ideal, a belief in "religious activism, combined with the demand for personal conversions, created within evangelicalism a heavy stress upon individualism."⁵³ As such, Moody's believed that the best way to save those lost from God was to have them assert their own lives within their faith which came from messaging Christianity directly to them. The social/political ideal stemmed from what historian Daniel J. Elazar called an "individualistic political culture," which "holds politics to be just another means by which individuals may improve themselves socially and economically. In this sense politics is a 'business' like any other that competes for talent and offers rewards to those who take it up as a career."⁵⁴ Moody applied these views, which were popular in the Midwest and much of the country during the era, to his evangelism, stressing the connection between Christianity, self-reliance, and economic sustainability.

⁵¹ Moody, *Heaven*, 43; emphasis added.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵³ Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody*, 82.

⁵⁴ Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View From the States* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966), 86-87.

Ingersoll's individualism shared with Moody the social/political dimension celebrated by those from the Midwest, but replaced the religious dimension with a philosophical one. In particular, Ingersoll's individualism connected more directly to the "Classical Liberalism" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This version of individualism championed human reason, self-determination, religious toleration, and economic freedom.⁵⁵ In particular, Ingersoll shared an affinity for the philosopher Herbert Spencer.⁵⁶ Of Spencer, Ingersoll wrote that, "He sees that right and wrong do not depend upon the arbitrary will of even an infinite being, but upon the nature of things; that they are relations, not entities, and that they cannot exist, so far as we know, apart from human experience."⁵⁷ Spencer's purely naturalistic ethics deeply impacted Ingersoll's view of individualism. Yet again, Ingersoll and Moody's convergence on individualism emanated from their religious (or non-religious) commitments—Moody's evangelism and Ingersoll's agnosticism.

In all, Moody saw Heaven as the "place of victory and triumph," a place where believers who labored for their own salvation and rectitude resided when their time on Earth ended.⁵⁸ As such, skeptics and infidels would not vanquish their commitment to God. "All the infidels in the world could not convince me that I have not a different spirit

⁵⁵ For more on Classical Liberalism, see Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000) and George H. Smith, *The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵⁶ For Spencer's concept of individualism and its relation to social systems, see Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 310-311.

⁵⁷ Robert G. Ingersoll, "Preface to Prof. Van Buren Denslow's *Modern Thinkers*," *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 12—*Tributes and Miscellany*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), 10-11.

⁵⁸ Moody, *Heaven*, 65.

than I had before I became a Christian,” declared Moody and, “That that is born of the flesh is flesh and that that born of the spirit is spirit, and a man can soon tell whether he is born of the spirit by the change in his life.”⁵⁹ Again, Moody demonstrated the difference between the natural and supernatural, the sacred and the profane. This was intentional; like Ingersoll with believers, Moody often spoke or wrote to nonbelievers in the hope that they would convert to Christianity. In his closing, he reaffirmed this goal, stating that “your turn and mine will come by-and-by, if we are but faithful; let us see that we do not lose the crown. Let us awake and put on the whole armor of God...”⁶⁰ Dwight Moody’s lecture on Heaven provided far more than just his take on the afterlife. It also demonstrated his belief in the supernatural preceding the natural and the individual commitment one makes to God in the face of earthly problems.

Naturally, Robert Ingersoll’s *Hell* presented a counter-example of Christianity, a faith riddled with barbarism and superstition.⁶¹ It is in this lecture that Ingersoll displayed his role as the intellectual foil to Dwight Moody. His first sentence conjured a rather different picture of the afterlife and of Christianity. “The idea of a hell,” Ingersoll noted, “was born of revenge and brutality on the one side, and cowardice on the other. In my judgment the American people are too brave, too charitable, too generous, too magnanimous, to believe in the infamous dogma of an eternal hell.”⁶² In Ingersoll’s mind, believing in the eternal torture and torment of Hell seemed counter to everything that his

⁵⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 107.

⁶¹ As he put it, “Barbarians have produced, and always will produce barbarian religions; barbarians have produced and always will produce ideas in harmony with their surroundings, and all the religions of the past were produced by barbarians” (Ingersoll, *Hell*, 4).

⁶² Ibid., 3.

modern existence and ethics desired. Moody's "Heaven" might be as wonderful as it appeared, but to Ingersoll, that never justified the sheer inhumanity of the doctrine of Hell.

Rebuking Moody's delineation between natural and supernatural, Ingersoll outlined his view of the origins of religion:

Every religion in this world is the work of man. Every book has been written by man. Men existed before the books. If books had existed before man, I might admit there was such a thing as a sacred volume. Man never had an idea—man will never have an idea, except those supplied to him by his surroundings. Every idea in the world that man has come to him by nature.⁶³

Ingersoll believed that religion was nothing more than the product of people's inability to understand the natural world around them. What helped humanity grow beyond the superstitions of the past, at least in Ingersoll's opinion, was the expansion of understanding brought forth by science and ethics. In his words, "Science has done it; education and the growing heart of man has done it."⁶⁴ Rather than the evangelical progress Moody promised in Heaven, Ingersoll's commitment to the earthly progress of humanity only flourished if his fellow countrymen abandoned doctrines like hell.

Ingersoll furthered this criticism in subsequent pages, where he decried some of the more unethical examples of the supposed "Good Book." It is here that Ingersoll's feminism came into play, as he criticized the way the Bible views the sexes in I Corinthians.⁶⁵ "Even the Savior didn't put man and woman upon any equality," wrote

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁵ The passage reads: "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman" (I Corinthians 11: 8-9, as quoted in Ingersoll, *Hell*, 7).

Ingersoll, “The man could divorce the wife, but the wife could not divorce the husband, and according to the Old Testament, the mother had to ask forgiveness for being the mother of babes. Splendid!”⁶⁶ Ingersoll’s rejection of the Biblical understanding of gender and marriage harkened back to his wife’s feminist influence, alongside other notable woman freethinkers like suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Helen Gardener.⁶⁷ This more progressive distinction contrasted with the traditional views of Moody, whose marriage to wife Emma represented the Biblically aligned gender roles of wife as caretaker and husband as moral and spiritual leader.⁶⁸ In fairness to the evangelist, most families during the late nineteenth century in the United States resembled Moody’s rather than Ingersoll’s.⁶⁹

Another ethical dilemma that Ingersoll addressed was Divine Justice, specifically the threat of eternal punishments as a means of ethical change. As he wrote, “It is in the very nature of things that torments inflicted have no tendency to bring a wicked man to repentance. Then why torment him if it will not do him good? ...Punishment inflicted for gratifying the appetite makes man not afraid but debases him.”⁷⁰ Ingersoll’s moral individualism elevated his belief in rehabilitation in the world of humanity rather than in the celestial court of God. This reaffirmed his commitment to “judge the matter by what we know, by what we think, by what we love.”⁷¹ Instead of anticipating the future justice

⁶⁶ Ingersoll, *Hell*, 7.

⁶⁷ Kimberly A. Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women’s Rights in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 51.

⁶⁸ Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist*, 374-375.

⁶⁹ Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 46-48.

⁷⁰ Ingersoll, *Hell*, 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

of God as Moody defended, Ingersoll placed his sentiments with that of the natural world and human justice. Flawed as it may be, Ingersoll saw earthly justice as preferable to the capricious and malevolent promise of eternal damnation.

In his closing, Ingersoll declared that he was “willing to give up heaven to get rid of hell. I had rather there should be no heaven than that any solitary soul should be condemned to suffer for ever and ever.” He also restated that the “doctrine of hell is infamous beyond all power to express. I wish there were words mean enough to express my feelings of loathing on this subject.” He echoed reformers, many of whom were Protestant believers, of the nineteenth century with one of his last observations in the lecture:

I believe the time will come when every criminal will be treated as we now treat the diseased and sick, when every penitentiary will become a reformatory; and that if criminals go to them with hatred in their bosoms, they will leave them without feelings of revenge.

Ingersoll’s steadfast devotion to the real world, as he understood it, expressly repudiated the divine pronouncements of justice by preachers like Moody. To build a better world, one must acknowledge it was all we had, or as Ingersoll professed, “the great harmonies of science, which are rescuing from the prisons of superstition the torn and bleeding heart of man.”⁷²

Moody’s “Heaven” and Ingersoll’s “Hell” became successful lectures for the two men, but more importantly, they displayed the contrasting, yet complementary styles of the two orators. Both Ingersoll and Moody grounded their arguments in moral terms,

⁷² Ibid., 14; for more on the connection to Protestantism and the reform of prisons during the nineteenth century, see Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction: Prisons and Religion in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

making the case for either spiritual or humane justice. They also established their own forms of ethics, with Moody's dedicated to the higher purpose of God and Ingersoll's to the higher purpose of mankind. Where they differed also highlighted their similarities. While Ingersoll denounced the Bible and Moody celebrated it, they had equally mastered the text, quoting from it copiously in each lecture and tying their arguments to Biblical explanations or obfuscations. As such, these two lectures demonstrated their relationship as foils in a publically displayed exchange on the collision between faith and reason in the lives of nineteenth-century Americans. It also demonstrated Ingersoll's place within the culture as a public intellectual whose synthesis of ideas compelled believers like Moody to respond.

Sowing and Reaping

A more contentious direct exchange between Moody and Ingersoll occurred later in their careers, spurred by the publication of the evangelist's 1896 sermon, *Sowing and Reaping*.⁷³ Moody's lecture called for individual initiative and personal responsibility as a way to become closer to God. To Moody, this was an extension of his view of divine justice. Moody wrote:

Our whole life is thus bounded and governed by laws ordained and established by God, and that a man reaps what he sows is a law that can be easily observed and verified, whether we regard sowing to the flesh or sowing to the Spirit. The evil harvest of sin and the good harvest of

⁷³ The title, and his overall concept, was based on a passage from the book of Galatians: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Moody believed that this phrase contained "truths that no infidel or sceptic [sic] will dare to deny." (Galatians 7: 7-8, as quoted in Dwight Lyman Moody, *Sowing and Reaping* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1896), 9, accessed September 30, 2015, Project Gutenberg.

righteousness are as sure to follow the sowing as the harvest of wheat and barley. “Life is not casual, but causal.”⁷⁴

Moody’s establishment of the divine law of sowing and reaping gave followers of his brand of Christianity a sense of *agency*—reasserting the role of the individual in their own lives as the Second Great Awakening had decades before. Ingersoll’s own moral individualism would have appreciated Moody’s pronouncement of agency, but would balk at the idea that it came from God.

Continuing this theme, Moody added, “Just as we cannot reap a good harvest unless we have sown good seed, so we cannot reap eternal life unless we have sown to the spirit.” “Sowing to the flesh,” Moody noted, would “reap corruption,” but sowing to the Spirit would “reap its immortal fruits.” As such, the way to reap the fortunes of God relied on an individual embracing “the most of the opportunities God has given us. It depends a good deal on ourselves what our future shall be.” An individual’s success, both materially and ethically, translated into spiritual success. However, “be not deceived” of the error of worshipping riches, for “He who sets his heart upon money is sowing to the flesh, and shall of the flesh reap corruption.”⁷⁵ Moody believed in a Christianized ethic of self-reliance where material success fostered ethical and spiritual responsibilities. Thus, Moody’s individualism also contained a component of duty, which argued that one’s personal choices must reaffirm their commitment to God.

Moody’s definition of “sowing to the spirit” embodied his own ethical beliefs that he developed during his years of preaching and philanthropy in Chicago. “In this world,” he noted, “the harvest is growth of character, deeper respect, increasing usefulness to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 19-20, 24, 40.

others; in the next world, acceptance with God, everlasting life.” Patience, perseverance, and reverence for family and others also typified this type of sowing.⁷⁶ In this regard, Moody’s civil ethics actually mirrored Ingersoll’s. Their devotion to family and to community, often in the form of charity, buttressed their own moral pronouncements.⁷⁷ However, their means of ethical life were vastly different. Towards the end of his lecture, Moody wrote that other religions and philosophies like Buddhism or Stoicism “exhibit a conflict between theory and practice” and that Christianity was the only refuge for an ethical life. “Christianity alone,” emphasized Moody, “will stand the test of raising man out of the pit.... It does not place sanctification before justification, but having first imparted life from above, it throws around the redeemed sinner the love of Christ and the fellowship and guidance of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁸ Christianity’s promise of redemption, in Moody’s view, put it above all worldviews and ethical systems.

Sowing and Reaping became a successful lecture for Moody. For example, on September 9, 1894, Moody gave the lecture to over 3,000 in Scranton, Pennsylvania.⁷⁹ However, it was not without criticism from Ingersoll. In an April 11, 1897 column for the *Kansas City Journal* concerning the lecture, Ingersoll barbed that Moody “ought to read something, ought to find out what the really intelligent have thought. He ought to get some new ideas—a few facts—and I think that, after he did, he would be astonished to find out how ignorant he had been. He is a good man. His heart is fairly good, but his

⁷⁶ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁷ For more on Moody and Ingersoll’s charitable activities, see Findlay, *Dwight Moody*, 84-85, 117-118 and Larson, *American Infidel*, 189.

⁷⁸ Moody, *Sowing and Reaping*, 154-155.

⁷⁹ “Plain Talk to Audience of Men,” *Scranton Tribune*, September 10, 1894, p. 5, accessed June 13, 2016, Chronicling America.

head is almost useless.”⁸⁰ Typical of Ingersoll, he excoriated Moody’s intellectual footing but complimented his moral instincts.

In an undated article from his collected works, Ingersoll expounds on his criticism of Moody’s lecture.⁸¹ “The trouble with this sermon, ‘Sowing and Reaping,’” wrote Ingersoll, “is that he [Moody] contradicts it.” As Ingersoll elaborated:

I believe that a man must reap what he sows, that every human being must bear the natural consequences of his acts. Actions are good or bad according to their consequences. That is my doctrine.

There is no forgiveness in nature. But Mr. Moody tells us that a man may sow thistles and gather figs, that having acted like a fiend for seventy years, he can, between his last dose of medicine and his last breath, repent; that he can be washed clean by the blood of the lamb, and that myriads of angels will carry his soul to heaven—in other words, that this man will not reap what he sowed, but what Christ sowed, that this man's thistles will be changed to figs.

This doctrine, to my mind, is not only absurd, but dishonest and corrupting.⁸²

In other words, no amount of “sowing” that a person did in this life will amount to the forgiveness of sins through Christ. A person can be terrible, what Moody called “sowing seeds of the flesh,” and can be forgiven for all of it in a flash, negating whatever that person actually did. Ingersoll’s criticism of *Sowing and Reaping* insisted that a moral individualism, not devoted to religious beliefs, created a more ethical society.

⁸⁰ “Ingersoll Talks Back,” *Kansas City Journal*, April 11, 1897, p. 1, accessed June 13, 2016, [Chronicling America](#).

⁸¹ Robert G. Ingersoll, “Sowing and Reaping,” in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 11—*Miscellany*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 887-895, accessed October 24, 2014, [Project Gutenberg](#). It is likely that this short article originally appeared as “Ingersoll on Moody,” *Chicago World*, April 7, 1897, Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 32, Slide 58-59.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 889-890.

Also, the existence of hell returned as a key gripe of Ingersoll. In his analogy, if “Mr. A” lived a “good and useful life” but did not accept Christ, he would be sent to hell. Whereas, “Mr. B.” lived a “useless and wicked life” and before he was hanged “he got religion and his soul went from the scaffold to heaven.” With his own moral individualism outraged, Ingersoll added, “And yet Mr. Moody says that as a man sows so shall reap. Mr. Moody ought to have a little philosophy—and a little good sense.” This argument cut Moody’s sermon to the core, highlighting that according to his own theology of heaven and hell, a person’s life on Earth did not matter. All that mattered was their acceptance of a creed, which Ingersoll derided as “savage, ignorant, and idiotic.”⁸³

He ends his brief essay with another dedication to his own ethics and a bromide to Moody. “Theology is a curse,” wrote Ingersoll. “Science is a blessing. We do not need preachers, but teachers; not priests, but thinkers; not churches, but schools; not steeples, but observatories. We want knowledge. Let us hope that Mr. Moody will read some really useful books.”⁸⁴ Ingersoll placed his own individualism within the confines of reason and reality, at least as he saw it. There was no need for calls to do right in anticipation of some eternal reward. Humanity should be good to each other now, where it counted, because it did not matter to God’s supposed plan. While they both held individualism and moral righteousness as key values, Ingersoll placed his ethics within a secular framework while Moody’s championed Christianized morals.

1897-8: The Crucial Years

⁸³ Ibid., 891-893.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 895.

After the public sparring over *Sowing and Reaping*, Moody and Ingersoll spent 1897-98 practically following each other on the lecture circuit. In January 1897, Ingersoll retired from practicing law to devote all his energies to public speaking. Upon learning of his retirement, a commentator noted that, “Colonel Ingersoll’s decision to desert law for the lecture platform ought to make Brother Moody and Brother Talmage gird up their loins and prepare to give battle.”⁸⁵ One interesting encounter was recorded by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. In April of 1897, Moody and Ingersoll were both passing through St. Louis and had ended up at the same hotel.⁸⁶ They rode each other coattails, both for good news coverage and for intellectual sparring in the public arena.

As early as December 1896, their relationship as public orators and intellectuals became more entwined. In a piece in the *St. Louis Star*, Moody and Ingersoll debated the viability of the Bible as a sound doctrine for Christianity. In Moody’s column, entitled “The Bible is Truth and Life,” the evangelist appealed to the accounts of Jesus, archaeological evidence, and its influence on world affairs as supports for the Bible. He concluded with calling the doctrine, much like its prophet, “indestructible and unchangeable.” Ingersoll, by contrast, entitled his piece “The Bible is a Delusion” and elaborated on its confusing historicity and textual contradictions. He called the authorship of the Gospels into question, noting that the accounts of Jesus by Mark and Matthew were “inventions.” He also pointed to contradictions, such as Jesus calling to “love thy

⁸⁵ “Robert G. Ingersoll, Who Has Retired from Active Practice of the Law,” *New York Journal*, January 22, 1897, Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 32, Slide 10; *Scranton Telegraph*, January 27, 1897, Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 32, Slide 6.

⁸⁶ “Evangelists and Infidel,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 8, 1897, p. 3, Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 32, Slide 82.

neighbor” while simultaneously denouncing his detractors as “whitened sepulchers and hypocrites and vipers.” He closed with citing the war and death he associated with Christianity, of which Europe “for a thousand years would float the dripping banner of the Cross.”⁸⁷ As evidenced by this newspaper exchange, the two men displayed competing visions of the supposed “Good Book.”

Later in 1897, their encounter in St. Louis brought more than just residing at the same hotel. An interview Moody conducted with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* put Ingersoll on the defensive. The preacher commented that he did not “know a thing about him” and that Ingersoll did not “interest him the least.” He also challenged Ingersoll to find faults in his lecture, *Sowing and Reaping*. He said, “You go to Ingersoll when he gets here and show him my sermon on ‘Sowing and Reaping.’ If he denies anything in it you let me know. Send me a marked copy of the paper, will you? I’d just like to see what he’d say about it.” It is unclear whether Moody actually received something from the St. Louis reporters, but his taunting arguably inspired Ingersoll’s later comments on *Sowing and Reaping*.⁸⁸

Within days of each other in April 1897, the two celebrated orators performed in St. Louis. Moody spoke two nights (April 8 and 9), giving his talk on “Sowing and Reaping.” Ingersoll performed on April 12 and gave his lecture on “Truth.”⁸⁹ They also

⁸⁷ “The Bible is Truth and Life—The Bible is a Delusion,” *St. Louis Star*, December 4, 1896, Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 31, Slides 548-549.

⁸⁸ “Ingersoll Not in His Class,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 9, 1897, Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 32, Slide 82.

⁸⁹ “Moody’s Words Brought Tears,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 8, 1897, p. 12, Library of Congress, Newspaper Microfilm Collection; “Dwight Moody’s Closing Talk,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 9, 1897, p. 7, accessed August 6, 2015, Library of Congress, Newspaper Microfilm Collection; “Col. Ingersoll on ‘Truth,’” *St. Louis Globe*

provided answers for a jointly-published interview in the *New York Journal*. Moody responded that he prayed for Ingersoll's conversion, because "He is a better man than Saul of Tarsus.... I understand that he is a moral man, an exemplary husband and father, and as I intimated, I respect a hater of shams."⁹⁰ Ingersoll replied in kind, saying Moody "is a good man, but his ideas are too old."⁹¹ Even at their most contentious, the two orators never made it personal; the arguments against one another were intellectual, not ad hominem. It reinforced their styles, with Ingersoll as the public intellectual and Moody as the dedicated evangelist: keep it about the issues.

By 1898, Ingersoll and Moody's speaking dates continued to parallel each other, particularly in Ohio and Indiana. On April 16, 1898, the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* reported that the celebrated agnostic would deliver his lecture, "Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child," sometime later in the month.⁹² In the same issue, Moody was reported to have been in Cincinnati giving a sermon and commenting on the moral failings of Spain as a nation (his comments were made in the middle of a national dialogue on whether the United States would go to war with Spain; it eventually did).⁹³ A few days before, Moody

Democrat, April 12, 1897, p.2, accessed August 6, 2015, Library of Congress, Newspaper Microfilm Collection.

⁹⁰ "Ingersoll, Moody, and Miss Couzens—Hear Them," *New York Journal*, April 12, 1897, Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 32, Slide 100.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² In this lecture, Ingersoll further stressed the need for individual thought and action: "Standing in the presence of the Unknown [sic], all have the same right to think, and all are generally interested in the great questions of origin and destiny. All I claim, all I plead for, is liberty of thought and expression." (Robert G. Ingersoll, "The Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child," *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 1—*Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), 331.

⁹³ "Col. R. G. Ingersoll," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, April 16, 1898, p. 5, accessed April 13, 2016, Newspaper Archive; "Curse of Spain Upon God," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, April 16, 1898, p. 5, accessed April 13, 2016, Newspaper Archive.

had also been in Indianapolis, speaking to crowds about his prison evangelism program, which supplied “the jails and prisons throughout the country with wholesome Christian literature, which will appeal to the men behind the bars.”⁹⁴

Ingersoll eventually gave his lecture, “Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child,” to nearly 1,500 people at Fort Wayne’s Princess Rink on April 29, 1898. “He offered the same arguments for liberty of the mind and person as he has done hundreds of times before,” the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* reported. “However, for a time, he strayed from the old lecture long enough to pay tribute to the great republic which was about to make the first fight in the history of the world for the betterment of humanity” (referring to the United States’ impending war with Spain). Like Moody, Ingersoll saw war with Spain as justified, but instead of condemning Spain for its godlessness as Moody had, Ingersoll criticized the nation for “its selfishness, its superstition, and its degeneration.”⁹⁵ Both reached the same conclusion about Spain but came to it with their respective avenues of intellectual expression: evangelism for Moody, freethought for Ingersoll.

Moody appeared to be too close, to the displeasure of Ingersoll. On April 30, 1898, Ingersoll wrote to daughters Eva and Maud from Fort Wayne. He described his lecture on Abraham Lincoln to them, delivered a few days before in Indianapolis, Indiana (which he refers to as “Marion”) to an enthusiastic crowd. Yet, the lecture also received pressuring criticism.⁹⁶ “Many tried to heal me in that town,” wrote Ingersoll. “The

⁹⁴ “D. L. Moody, Evangelist,” *Indianapolis News*, April 14, 1898, p. 9, accessed May 19, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.

⁹⁵ “Bob Ingersoll,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, April 30, 1898, p. 5, accessed May 19, 2016, Newspaper Archive.

⁹⁶ The author had to determine whether Ingersoll was referring to Marion, Indiana, a city in Grant County, or Marion County, where Indianapolis is located. Based on research conducted with Grant County newspapers (*Fairmount News*, *Gas City*

Christians sent and got Mr. Moody to come and hold two tree meetings [likely sermons] on the same day.”⁹⁷ Moody did, in fact, hold two prayer meetings in Indianapolis shortly after Ingersoll reportedly gave his lecture, but the *Indianapolis News* failed to mention Ingersoll as his inspiration.⁹⁸ Regardless, the claim Ingersoll made of hostile crowds in Indiana holds weight, seeing as he was harassed by ministers in Terre Haute when he delivered his lecture “Why I am an Agnostic” there in May of 1898.⁹⁹ Much like their intellectual sparring in the press, Ingersoll and Moody continued to be point-counterpoint with their lecture circuit, with Moody responding to Ingersoll and vice versa. Sadly, this would end less than a year later.

Conclusion: A Complicated Relationship

On July 21, 1899, Robert Ingersoll died of heart failure at his home in New York; tributes from both friends and foes filled the newspapers. A few days later, the press asked Moody about the orator’s death, and while he reaffirmed his belief that Ingersoll was an “exemplary man in his home life,” he nonetheless stuck to his view that

Weekly Journal, Upland Monitor) at the Indiana State Library, Newspaper Microfilm Collection, it was likely that Ingersoll referred to Marion County, seeing as the Grant County papers made no mention of his visit.

⁹⁷ Robert G. Ingersoll to “Girls,” Fort Wayne, Indiana, April 30, 1898, Gordon Stein Collection of Robert Green Ingersoll, 1801-1979, Southern Illinois University, Special Collections Research Center, Box 1, Folder 5. It is unclear what Ingersoll meant by “tree meeting.” Perhaps it was an outside gathering, which Moody had done scores of times in the past. For more on Moody’s outdoor sermons, see Evensen, *God’s Man for the Gilded Age*, 62-65.

⁹⁸ “The Moody Meetings,” *Indianapolis News*, April 13, 1898, p. 9, accessed June 17, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.

⁹⁹ “Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll,” *Saturday Evening Mail* (Terre Haute, Indiana), April 30, 1898, p. 5, accessed May 19, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles; “Short and Spicy,” *Hoosier State* (Newport, Indiana), May 18, 1898, p. 1, accessed May 19, 2016, Newspaper Archive.

Ingersoll's view of Christianity was "twisted" by its "dark side."¹⁰⁰ Unbeknown to Moody, his time on earth would be limited as well. Paralleling Ingersoll again, Moody died just months later, also of heart failure, on December 22, 1899. He gave his last public sermon on November 16, 1898 in Kansas City, Missouri, to a crowd of nearly 15,000 people. His former songwriting partner, Ira Sankey, lamented his friend's death, commenting that Moody was "one of the most remarkable men of the century, distinguished especially for his devotion to the cause of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel to the world."¹⁰¹ It was truly the end of an era.

Robert Green Ingersoll and Dwight Lyman Moody represented two sides of America's religious identity: one steeped in strong faith but one also enriched by Enlightenment values of skepticism, doubt, and scientific inquiry. While they never debated one another and likely never met, Ingersoll and Moody deeply influenced each other, causing each man to hone his arguments and oratorical style for the American public. However, to simply call them "orators" would be a disservice to both of them. Ingersoll was a public intellectual who synthesized philosophy, theology, and science into evidences and arguments the average American could understand. Moody was a talented evangelist who dedicated his life to broadening the appeal of Christianity to the masses, particularly those living in a new capitalist, industrial age.

¹⁰⁰ "Col. Ingersoll Dies Smiling," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 22, 1899, p. 1, accessed August 6, 2015, Library of Congress, Newspaper Microfilm Collection; "Moody's View of Ingersoll," *Chicago Tribune*, July 24, 1899, p. 2, accessed August 6, 2015, Library of Congress, Newspaper Microfilm Collection.

¹⁰¹ "Dwight L. Moody, Preacher to 7,000,000, Dies in the Hope He Offered to Others," *New York World*, December 23, 1899, p. 15, accessed June 17, 2016, Newspapers.com.

More importantly, they both created within their intellectual frameworks a compelling view of moral individualism. Moody's moral individual, rooted in a belief in Christ, concerned themselves with making their lives better and living exceptionally so that when the time comes to meet God, their heavenly reward will be granted. Ingersoll, by contrast, argued a rational, ethical life could be possible when one throws off the shackles of superstition and barbaric religious ideas. Ingersoll believed that this was the only life one was guaranteed to have, and it was one's duty to live as an ethical individual in order to build a better society for themselves and the future. Both relied upon their lives in the Midwest, and its cultural milieu, for constructing a better view of life, the universe, and everything in between.

In April of 1900, the Reverend H. M. Wharton gave a sermon on Moody and Ingersoll in Kansas City, where he echoed their contrasts as clearly as when they were alive: "The one walked the broad and beaten road that leads to destruction, the other went the straight and narrow way that leads to glory and to God."¹⁰² While this view certainly rang true to believers at the sermon, another view published in the Fond du Lac, Wisconsin *Reporter* equally epitomized their relationship: "Moody says Bob Ingersoll is a good man, but misguided. Ingersoll says Moody is misguided, but is a good man. According to their estimates of each other, there does not seem to be much difference between the two gentlemen."¹⁰³ Mencken was right; the two men were complementary

¹⁰² H. M. Wharton, *Moody and Ingersoll* (Kansas City: Press Tiernan-Havens Printing Company, 1900), 59, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

¹⁰³ *Fond du Lac Reporter* (Wisconsin), April (?) 1897, p. (?), Robert Green Ingersoll Papers, 1826-1940, Library of Congress, Microfilm Reel 32, Slide 90.

partners in an intellectual dance that reshaped the Midwest during the late nineteenth century.

Chapter Two analyzed the public interactions of Robert Ingersoll and Dwight Moody, but in pamphlets and in newspapers. Their theological differences, along with their ethical similarities, underscore how the two men served as a point-counterpoint to one another. Also, the interactions between Ingersoll and Moody demonstrated Ingersoll's position as a public intellectual during the late nineteenth century, sharing complex concepts that the public could both understand and, in the case of Moody, respond to. Their moral individualism, informed by their experiences in Illinois, further illustrate the central Midwest as a prism for issues of religion and freethought during the late nineteenth century in the United States.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FREETHINKER SOCIETY OF INDIANAPOLIS

*“When you cease striving.
When you cease learning.
Have yourself buried.”
-- Feuchtersleben¹*

Introduction

In chapter two, Robert Ingersoll’s ideas, and the reactions from evangelist Dwight Moody, were analyzed within a regional context of the central Midwest. However, did Ingersoll’s influence in the Midwest extend beyond his public debates with Moody during the Golden Age of Freethought? To find out, one needs to analyze the most influential element of freethought in Indianapolis: The Freethinker Society of Indianapolis. Founded by German-Americans in 1870, the Freethinker Society was one of the city’s first non-religious organizations and facilitated freethought ideas and practices through educational lectures and social gatherings. As philosophical radicals, the society’s members saw their activism as a corollary of the revolutionary spirit of the Turnvereins, social clubs founded by German immigrants to America that advocated physical fitness, education, and democratic ideals.

This chapter analyzes the society as a case study for understanding the successes and failures of freethought in the central Midwest, with an emphasis on Indiana, during the late nineteenth century. Did the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis illustrate the larger rise and fall of the Golden Age of Freethought, of which Robert Ingersoll was a

¹ Quoted in Theodore Stempfel, *Festschrift: Fifty Years of Unrelenting German Aspirations in Indianapolis* (1898; reprint, Indianapolis: German American Center and Indiana German Heritage Society, Inc., 1991), 40.

vital part? Can its effectiveness speak to contextual themes that embody the influence of freethinkers during the late nineteenth century in the United States? Research suggests that the answer is yes, as the growth and eventual disbandment of the organization paralleled trends within the national freethought movement, specifically organizations like the American Secular Union, with which Robert Ingersoll was associated.² Yet the society's larger influence proved to be more intellectual than institutional. From the outgrowth of future Indianapolis freethought organizations to the humanistic literature of Hoosier icon Kurt Vonnegut, the Freethinker Society's cultural influence on midwestern freethought endured long after its dissolution.

The Foundations of German Freethought: Karl Heinzen & German Radicalism

Understanding the Freethinker Society's legacy begins with contextualizing the ideological underpinnings behind its success. The relationship between the Indianapolis freethinkers and their German-American intellectual heritage can be traced to a deeply respected thinker who provided the movement with credibility: Karl Heinzen. A product of German liberalism and the failed revolutions of 1848, Heinzen rejected the more traditional leanings of his compatriots and created a more radical philosophy that heavily influenced German-Americans during the late nineteenth century. Heinzen believed in the strength of human reason to forge a new German identity, one predicated on republican government, the separation of church and state, and scientific progress. His professional relationship with Hermann Lieber, one of the founders of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, brought his ideas to Indiana through publication of his lectures.

² For more on this trend, see Sydney Warren, *American Freethought, 1860-1914* (1943; reprint, New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), 169-171.

In turn, Heinzen's ideas further influenced the future Freethinker Society, both in its politics and its opinions regarding religion and spirituality.

Karl Peter Heinzen was born February 22, 1809, in Grevenbrioch, Dusseldorf, Germany, to Joseph Heinzen and Eisetze Schmitz. Raised as a Catholic, Heinzen's education in science, particularly in anatomy at the University of Bonn, informed his growing radicalism.³ After entering the national service, Heinzen spent time abroad in Batavia (modern day Jakarta, Indonesia) and wrote of his experiences in his first book, *Journey of a German Romanticist to Batavia*, published in 1845.⁴ His time in the east radicalized him on the issue of slavery. Seeing the poor treatment of enslaved natives angered the young Heinzen and he spent the rest of his life fighting against the terrible practice.⁵

After returning home from abroad, Heinzen spent time as a tax collector before his foray into political writing. He wrote pamphlets critical of the Prussian government, which agitated the authorities and spurred his eventual flight to the United States in 1847, under the auspices of a work assignment. Once he had heard of the revolutions encircling Europe during 1848, and in particular Prussia, Heinzen returned to the continent and actively participated in the call for major reforms of the monarchy. The Prussian Revolution, escalated by fierce protests throughout Berlin and greater Prussia for most of

³ Carl Wittke, *Against the Grain: The Life of Karl Heinzen (1809-1880)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 1-8.

⁴ Karl Heinzen, *Reise eines teutschen Romantikers nach Batavia* [*Journey of a German Romanticist to Batavia*] (Mannheim: Friedrich Bafferman, Publisher, 1845), accessed October 26, 2015, Internet Archive.

⁵ Wittke, *Against the Grain*, 12.

1848 and 1849, ultimately failed from a lack of consensus on the nature of reforms.⁶ As a result, Heinzen again fled to the United States in 1850 and, like many politically radical Germans, attempted reforms in his new home country. His early stints at publishing generated little interest, but when he founded *der Pioneer* (*The Pioneer*) in 1854, Heinzen found an outlet for his views that would last over 25 years. A radical newspaper in Boston, Massachusetts, *The Pioneer* regularly published articles that favored the end of slavery, African-American emancipation, and a strict separation of church and state.⁷

During his years in the United States, Heinzen cultivated relationships with other religious and political radicals. One such radical was Robert Ingersoll. The two met in 1878 at Ingersoll's home in Washington, D.C. Heinzen's experience with Ingersoll engendered both respect and disappointment. While he appreciated Ingersoll's "generous, jovial, and entertaining" persona, Heinzen saw his politics as too conservative.⁸ As biographer Carl Wittke noted, Heinzen "was disappointed that his [Ingersoll's] radicalism did not go beyond the boundaries of religion."⁹ Nevertheless, they both appreciated the progressive nature of science, particularly the work of German naturalist and philosopher Alexander Friedrich Heinrich von Humboldt.

Decades before Ingersoll and Heinzen, Humboldt was an "out-and-out empiricist—facts, numbers, measurement, these, not philosophical speculation, were for

⁶ Ibid., 60-61; Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 468-509.

⁷ Mischa Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists after 1848* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 137-157.

⁸ Wittke, *Against the Grain*, 82-95.

⁹ Ibid.

him the building blocks of science.”¹⁰ Born in Berlin in 1769, Humboldt became one of the most widely respected scientists of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. His expeditions to Central and South America illuminated the scientific community on the geology, biology, and even sociological aspects of the region and his efforts led to his admission to the American Philosophical Society in 1804 by President Thomas Jefferson. However, his influence on the German freethinkers came in two forms: first, a commitment to empiricism and the scientific method, and second, an impassioned resistance to the practice of slavery, the latter element reinforced by witnessing it first-hand on his expeditions.¹¹ Alexander Humboldt’s contributions to science and skepticism left a broad, indelible stamp on the nineteenth century.

As evidence of his influence, Karl Heinzen and Robert Ingersoll both wrote lectures on Humboldt’s ideas for the centennial of his birth on September 14, 1869. Ingersoll delivered his lecture in Peoria, Illinois, and Heinzen delivered his in Boston, Massachusetts.¹² In his speech, Ingersoll focused on Humboldt’s contribution to the expansion of scientific knowledge and his commitment to naturalism and empiricism. “He was one of the few,” Ingersoll declared, “great enough to rise above the superstition and prejudice of his time, and to know that experience, observation, and reason are the

¹⁰ Peter Watson, *The German Genius: Europe’s Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 178.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹² Aaron Sachs, *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism* (New York: Viking, 2006), 107; Robert G. Ingersoll, “Humboldt,” in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll, Volume 1—Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 85-102, accessed October 24, 2014, Project Gutenberg; Karl Heinzen, *The True Character of Humboldt* (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Association for the Propagation of Radical Principles, 1869), 1-18, Internet Archive.

only basis of knowledge.”¹³ It is also in this speech that Ingersoll places science’s features within a philosophical naturalism, one in deep contrast to religious ideas. Ingersoll exclaimed: “Superstition has always been the relentless enemy of science; faith has been a hater of demonstration; hypocrisy has been sincere only in its dread of truth, and all religions are inconsistent with mental freedom.”¹⁴ Ingersoll believed that Humboldt’s influence laid deeper than with simply scientific ideas. Rather, his creation of a complete intellectual system of naturalism had an immense impact on both German and American freethinkers.

Heinzen concurred. Like Ingersoll, Heinzen emphasized Humboldt’s materialism, but also stressed his diplomatic nature with those with religious beliefs. “There are those,” Heinzen wrote, “who will be horrified by the discovery that Humboldt, who never suggested an open war against belief and religion, and who was even on the best terms with the most prominent advocates of religious views, was an atheist and materialist.”¹⁵ Nonetheless, Heinzen described Humboldt’s stern commitment to science, writing that “all that which does not harmonize with [science] he declares, indirectly, to be nothing but chimera.”¹⁶ Humboldt defined his world, in Heinzen’s perspective, through understanding nature and its “laws” while rejecting all that is in contrast with materialism. These concepts motivated Ingersoll and Heinzen’s lectures and their own devotion to the scientific method.

¹³ Ingersoll, “Humboldt,” 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹⁵ Heinzen, *The True Character of Humboldt*, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

Alongside Humboldt, German-Americans and Ingersoll also celebrated the British-American Revolutionary and deist freethinker Thomas Paine. In 1880, the German newspaper the *Illinois Staats Zeitung* “devoted several columns to a speech delivered in Chicago by Ingersoll, in which the famous orator sought to vindicate Paine's religious views.”¹⁷ He also delivered a speech at a Thomas Paine anniversary celebration in 1892, where he was “enthusiastically” written about in the *New Yorker Staats Zeitung*.¹⁸ Ingersoll’s public orations in front of German-Americans, either celebrating scientists like Humboldt or revolutionaries like Thomas Paine, reinforced his influence upon this new cultural segment within the United States. It also showed German-Americans’ appreciation of not only their native culture but also their willingness to accept new ideas from a public intellectual like Ingersoll, as well as Heinzen.

Even though the German freethinker resided in Boston, Karl Heinzen’s ideas spread throughout the Midwest. In particular, the Association for the Propagation of Radical Principles, an organization in Indianapolis run by Hermann Lieber, published Heinzen’s lecture on Humboldt.¹⁹ This organization, run out of Lieber’s own business, published many lectures by Heinzen and advertised their sale in a local freethought newspaper, the *Iconoclast* (the paper also routinely published pieces from and about Ingersoll).²⁰ One that would have a profound, but controversial impact was his 1882

¹⁷ Mark O. Kistler, “German-American Liberalism and Thomas Paine,” *American Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring, 1962): 89, accessed September 5, 2016, JSTOR.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Association for the Propagation of Radical Principles, “Works of Karl Heinzen,” advertisement published in *Iconoclast* (Indianapolis, Indiana), March 4, 1882, p. 8, Indiana State Library Manuscript Collection.

lecture, *Separation of State and Church*.²¹ Heinzen believed in the Jeffersonian maxim of “separation of church and state,” but somewhat expanded its meaning.

Instead of a mere political interest in separating the state from the church as an institution, Heinzen believed that the state should also be separate from *religion* as an ideology. Heinzen wrote:

To secure this freedom it is the business of the state not to hinder it. In so far, therefore, every one [sic] must be, retaining his expression, for separation of religion and state, i.e., in other words, for securing religious and every other conviction, and its expression against encroachments by the powers of the state.²²

In this regard, Heinzen was actually closer to the Enlightenment tradition of “freedom of conscience,” a philosophy predicated on the protection of individual beliefs from encroachments by the state.²³ What made his perspective different, however, was also a commitment to a free society in general. “Religion should be free,” Heinzen exclaimed, “but not a *license* for infringing the common rights and for breaking the laws of the state.”²⁴ This distinction between the rights of the individual and the privileges bestowed by society would influence the founding documents of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis and its own advocacy in the public sphere. In all, Heinzen’s revolutionary writings on religion, politics, and society heavily impacted Indianapolis’s German-

²¹ Karl Heinzen, *Separation of State and Church* (Indianapolis: The Association for the Propagation of Radical Principles, 1882), Google Books.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

²³ A product of seventeenth-eighteenth-century liberalism, “freedom of conscience” was eloquently presented by philosophers John Locke, Baruch Spinoza, and John Stuart Mill. For more on the development of this tradition, see George H. Smith, *The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 89-94.

²⁴ Heinzen, *Separation of State and Church*, 5.

American community, influencing them to create an organization for the propagation of Heinzen's essential ideas.

The Freethinker Society of Indianapolis: Its Founding, Rise, and Dissolution

As a specific outgrowth of Heinzen's ideas, German-Americans Karl Beyschlag, Clemens Vonnegut, and Hermann Lieber, among others, founded the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis on April 3, 1870. The city's first public non-religious organization, the society used the Socialer Turnverein, a German-American social club at 230 East Maryland Street, as the venue for the majority of their initial meetings.²⁵ These three men, alongside future society President Philip Rappaport, served as the intellectual bedrock of the society and the Turnverein provided the institutional infrastructure needed for the society's future growth. To understand their lives is to understand the Freethinker Society.

A professor, postal delivery clerk, and Heinzen devotee, Karl Beyschlag was born in Bavaria and came to the United States as a political refugee, most likely the result of the failed 1848 revolutions. After time in St. Louis and Detroit as a newspaper editor, Beyschlag spent the last 14 years of his life in Indianapolis, using his skills as a writer for local German newspaper publications.²⁶ Beyschlag, as a key figure within the German-

²⁵ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, trans. Kaethe Schwarz and Charles Spencer, ed. Giles Hoyt, Claudia Grossman, and Sabine Jessner (Indianapolis: Indiana Heritage, 1987), Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Library, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, 1. During its formal organization, the Freethinker Society operated under different names, most notably the "Freethinkers Society," the "Freethinker Society," and the "Freethinkers Association." For the purposes of this essay, the group will be referred to as the "Freethinker Society," which is consistent with the title of the English translation of its minutes (Ibid., 1, 18).

²⁶ "Death of Prof. Beyschlag," *Indianapolis News*, January 16, 1883, p. 3.

American freethought community, largely inspired the society's inception. As chronicled in the society's official minutes, "Mr. Beyschlag gave a lecture and illustrated different points of view essential for a union of liberal German elements, who, because of their disagreement, could not reach a goal until it was reached through their cooperation."²⁷ Beyschlag believed that the founding of the society could bring together all the disparate elements of German freethought within their community and organize them towards providing education and fellowship for future freethinkers. Further illustrating his commitment to this cause, he wrote the organization's original constitution and was elected its first permanent lecturer.²⁸ His death in 1883 cut short his influence within the society, but his impact on its formation was never lost on future members.

Another principal founder, Hermann Lieber, belonged to the larger Lieber family, one of Indianapolis's most accomplished German-American families.²⁹ Born in Dusseldorf, Germany, Lieber came to the United States in 1853, seeking more freedom than the failed revolutions of 1848 provided his former home. He came to Indianapolis shortly thereafter and built his small framing store into one of the most respected art dealerships of its era, employing over 200 people.³⁰ Like Beyschlag, Lieber read Karl Heinzen's works and, as discussed above, used his own publishing house for

²⁷ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3; Stempfel, *Festschrift*, 40. Due to funding issues, Beyschlag only served as the permanent lecturer until October of 1870, when he resigned (Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 8).

²⁹ His brother, Colonel Richard Lieber, helped found the Indiana state parks system.

³⁰ "Type of German Businessman," *Indianapolis Press*, March 10, 1900, p. 4.

disseminating Heinzen's lectures to the general public.³¹ In an effort to instill the values of skepticism, athleticism, and education of Heinzen and other German thinkers, Lieber co-founded the politically radical Socialer Turnverein during the late 1860s.³² This organization proved essential to the formation and success of the Freethinker Society. Most importantly, he served as one of the society's earliest organizers. He actively participated in executive committee meetings from its foundation in 1870 and later served as society president from 1875-1879.³³

Philip Rappaport, while not a principal founder, became one of the society's most influential members. Born in Fuerth, Bavaria, in March 1845, Rappaport came to the United States in 1868. He lived in West Virginia for two years, learning the craft of newspaper editing before moving to Indianapolis in 1870. After a brief stint practicing law, Rappaport bought the *Indiana Tribüne* in 1873. The *Tribüne* became the flagship German newspaper in Indianapolis, and he served as its editor-in-chief until 1900. During his editorship, Rappaport covered Ingersoll's career, specifically Clemens Vonnegut's translation of Ingersoll's *Open Letter to the Clergy of Indianapolis*.³⁴ As the most outspoken socialist within the leadership of the Freethinker Society, Rappaport

³¹ Association for the Propagation of Radical Principles, "Works of Karl Heinzen," advertisement published in *Iconoclast* (Indianapolis, Indiana), March 4, 1882, p. 8.

³² Athenaeum Turners, *Athenaeum Turners: 1851-1951: One Hundredth Anniversary* (Indianapolis: Athenaeum Turners, 1951), 4, Manuscript Collection, Indiana State Library.

³³ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 1, 16, 20, 50; "City News," *Indianapolis News*, February 25, 1878, p. 4, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles.

³⁴ *Indiana Tribüne*, May 14, 1882, p. 7, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles; "Düchertisch," *Indiana Tribüne*, January 13, 1894, p. 1, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles.

oftentimes used the society, the Socialer Turnverein, and his newspaper for expressing his views. He became president of the society in 1879 and served for four years, until his resignation in 1883.³⁵ Of the four major members of the society, Rappaport's own political views embodied the closest relationship to their intellectual fountainhead, Karl Heinzen.

However, the most influential member of the society, both in its time and afterward, was Clemens Vonnegut. Born November 20, 1824, in Munster, Westphalia, Vonnegut studied in German public schools and apprenticed as a mercantile clerk. He came to the United States in the early 1830s, on assignment from his employer, J. L. de Ball and Company, which sold specialty fabrics. His year in New York convinced the young Vonnegut that America would be his permanent home, and he traveled to Indianapolis with his friend Charles Volmer to start a new life.³⁶ He founded the Vonnegut Hardware Store in 1852, and was considered "one of the city's most respected citizens...."³⁷ Like Lieber, he was a co-founder of the Socialer Turnverein and a forceful voice for public education, founding the German-English Independent School and serving on its board for over 30 years. He served as the first president of the Freethinker Society from 1870-1875, gave lectures to the society on occasion, and even translated Robert Ingersoll's *Open Letter to the Clergy of Indianapolis* into German for

³⁵ "German Editor Dies Suddenly," *Indianapolis Star*, December 8, 1913, p. 1; Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 50, 97-98. He continued to serve in an interim capacity until the election of Alex Metzger as society president ("City News," *Indianapolis News*, December 13, 1883, p. 3, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles.

³⁶ "Record Worthy of Emulation," *Indianapolis Press*, January 23, 1900, p. 12.

³⁷ "Vonnegut Firm Oldest in City," *Indianapolis Star*, January 12, 1959, sec. 9, p. 12.

publication.³⁸ Vonnegut's work on this translation underscored his knowledge of Ingersoll's ideas and arguments, especially if it was his interest to translate it into German for the freethought movement within the Midwest (it was published in Milwaukee, Wisconsin). Overall, these four men embodied the ideological and social foundations of the society.

From its inception in 1870 to its dissolution in 1890, the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis worked towards two primary goals: education and advocacy. Education came in the form of lectures and talks, often given by society members on topics relevant to freethinkers, such as socialism, women's suffrage, science, theology, and American government.³⁹ Alongside these lectures, the society also devoted resources, both financial and instructional, to schools and extra-curricular services for youth. The leadership of the society deeply believed that the success of their organization, and the freethought movement in general, hinged on educating the young in freethought and secular ideas. As such, the association purchased schoolbooks and established a series of secular schools, including an industrial trade school.⁴⁰ Their secular Sunday school, held at the German-English School at 216 East Maryland Street, boasted strong attendance through most of

³⁸ Athenaeum Turners, *Athenaeum Turners: 1851-1951: One Hundredth Anniversary*, 4; "Record Worthy of Emulation," *Indianapolis Press*, January 23, 1900, p. 12; "Vonnegut Firm Oldest in City," *Indianapolis Star*, January 12, 1959, sec. 9, p. 12; Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 1, 20; Robert G. Ingersoll, *Offener Brief an die Indianapoliser Geistlichkeit*. Uebersetzt von Clemens Vonnegut, Sr. [*Open Letter to the Clergy of Indianapolis*. Translated by Clemens Vonnegut, Sr.] (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Freidenker Publishing Company, 188[?]), Indiana Pamphlet Collection, Indiana State Library.

³⁹ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 34, 37-40, 85-86.

⁴⁰ George Theodore Probst, *The Germans in Indianapolis, 1840-1918* (Indianapolis: German American Center and Indiana German Heritage Society, Inc., 1989), 100-101.

the year.⁴¹ Advocacy came in the form of alliances with national freethought groups and a dedication to the separation of church and state. To get a sense of these two goals, and whether the society actually achieved them, a detailed analysis is in order.

First, to accurately present the society's success, a discussion of membership is needed. Historian George Probst, in his study *The Germans in Indianapolis, 1840-1918*, claimed that the society had a membership of 150.⁴² His source for this number is William Holloway's 1870 history of Indianapolis, which also stated that one dollar was the quarterly membership fee.⁴³ Holloway does not cite a source for this number, and the official minutes of the society do not corroborate it. According to the society's official minutes, quarterly dues in 1870 were \$8.25. The society treasurer collected in the first quarter, \$196.25, which amounts to roughly 24 people.⁴⁴ The society minutes never place the membership rolls close to 150, even as fees for dues decreased. In 1878, the minutes recorded membership at 47, and the year before was 36.⁴⁵ In 1880, that number was back down to 35.⁴⁶ 1882 saw its highest numbers at 80.⁴⁷ While dues-paying membership never reached the amount indicated by Probst and Holloway, an increase of 56 members

⁴¹ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 59. Society President Phil Rappaport noted in his 1881 report to the society that the Sunday school experienced attendance issues once the spring and summer months came, but that the society would continue to serve students throughout the year (*Ibid.*, 65).

⁴² Probst, *The Germans in Indianapolis*, 70-71.

⁴³ William R. Holloway, *Indianapolis: A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City, A Chronicle of its Social, Municipal, Commercial, and Manufacturing Progress, with Full Statistical Tables* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Journal Print, 1870), 279, accessed November 9, 2015, Google Books.

⁴⁴ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 6-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

over 12 years is still an impressive growth that speaks to the organization's influence within the German-American community.

As mentioned above, giving educational lectures became one of the most important aspects of the Freethinker Society, especially in its peak years. These lectures served the group in two ways: first, they provided communal experiences often lost on those without religious belief, and second, they allowed members to have vibrant conversations that related to the promotion of freethought ideas. The first lecture by a member recorded in the minutes that addressed an educational subject and not official society business came from Philip Rappaport in 1875. Entitled "What Do We Need?," Rappaport's lecture argued for economic protectionism, civil service reform, and the adoption of the Gold Standard as a "remedy for the prevailing evil in the social and political life."⁴⁸ Vonnegut, Lieber, and other members of the society also gave lectures on religion, politics, philosophy, and science.⁴⁹ Additionally, when outside lecturers addressed the society, it published an advertisement for them in the local paper.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 52-53. Sometimes the lectures focused on more practical matters of the day. For example, a Dr. Sheller (a member whose first name was not recorded in the newspaper or the society's minutes) gave a lecture on "The physician and the sick-room" in March of 1878 and was "listened to by an attentive and appreciative audience" (Ibid., 45; "City News," *Indianapolis News*, March 11, 1878, p. 3, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles).

⁵⁰ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, "Freidenker-Verein!," advertisement in *Indiana Tribune* (Indianapolis), November 19, 1882, p. 1, accessed November 3, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles. For example, when W. S. Bell gave a lecture on "What has Free Thought to offer in place of Christianity" in June of 1878, the society advertised it in the *Indianapolis News* (German Freethinker Association, "W. S. Bell Lecture," advertisement published in *Indianapolis News*, June 10, 1878, p. 4, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles).

In conjunction with lectures, the society held evenings of entertainment and spirited debates. Musical interludes routinely occurred at Freethinker Society meetings, especially vocal numbers by either members or their wives.⁵¹ The debates among society members often covered the intricacies of scientific discovery, whether socialism was a viable political system, or most interestingly, the validity of women's suffrage.⁵² The most fascinating part of these debates involved Philip Rappaport, who changed his mind on whether or not women should have the right to vote. In an 1876 debate during a society meeting, Rappaport gave an "eloquent speech" against women's suffrage, but by 1882, in another debate, he favored it.⁵³ True to the creed of freethought and the society, Rappaport must have changed his mind when the evidence convinced him to.

Alongside education, advocacy for secularism and a freethought worldview motivated the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis. Co-founder Hermann Lieber wrote a letter to Congress in 1877 protesting a proposed constitutional amendment recognizing Christianity as the official state religion.⁵⁴ Also in that year, the society held a meeting and discussion concerning the creation of a possible statewide freethought organization (what they called a "state liberal league").⁵⁵ When these plans evaporated, the society coordinated its activism with freethought organizations in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,

⁵¹ "City News," *Indianapolis News*, April 22, 1878, p. 4, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles.

⁵² Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 34, 37-40, 85-86.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33, 88.

⁵⁴ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 37. A year earlier, the society displayed its own sense of patriotism with a float in the city's fourth of July Parade. Covered in "wreaths and garlands," the society's members deemed their float a "big success and held a large soiree afterwards" (*Ibid.*, 33).

⁵⁵ "Additional City News," *Indianapolis News*, December 12, 1877, p. 1, accessed November 8, 2014, Hoosier State Chronicles.

and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.⁵⁶ Years later, they held a 150th anniversary party to commemorate Thomas Paine's birth, encouraging all "freethinkers in the city" to attend.⁵⁷ As a barb against superstition, the society held a special meeting in 1883 that celebrated the cultural impact of Protestant reformer Martin Luther while simultaneously criticizing what they saw as his religious dogmatism and lack of egalitarianism in regards to the German peasants.⁵⁸ Lastly, the society set aside funds for the printing and dissemination of Karl Heinzen's freethought lecture "Six Letters to a Godly Man" as an educational tool for the group's mission and ideals.⁵⁹ In both its educational and advocacy roles, the Freethinker Society stayed very active throughout the 1870s and 1880s.

Paralleling the success of the Freethinker Society, the larger freethought movement in the United States during the 1870s and 1880s also experienced growth and success. The New York Freethinkers Association was founded in 1877 and held its first major convention a year later in Watkins, New York, with speeches that called for moral individualism, the separation of church and state, and human reason.⁶⁰ Four years later,

⁵⁶ Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 31-35, 53; "Greetings from our German Friends," *Index* (Boston, Massachusetts), January 6, 1876, p. 7, accessed November 8, 2015, Google Books. In particular, the society often organized speaking events with Milwaukee freethought leader H. F. Schuetz and even considered forming a life insurance cooperative with the Wisconsin-based group (Ibid., 25, 32).

⁵⁷ "City News," *Indianapolis News*, January 29, 1887, p. 8, accessed November 11, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles.

⁵⁸ "Locales," *Indiana Tribune* (Indianapolis), February 18, 1881, p. 8, accessed November 3, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles; Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 102.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁰ *The Proceedings and Addresses at the Freethinkers' Convention Held at Watkins, N.Y., 1878* (1878; reprint: New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 5-6, 337-351.

the organization grew into the Freethinkers of the United States and Robert Ingersoll addressed its convention.⁶¹ Next came the National Liberal League, founded in 1876, of which Hermann Lieber served with Robert Ingersoll on its executive committee during Lieber's years with the Freethinker Association of Indianapolis.⁶² In 1885, the National Liberal League became the American Secular Union (ASU), with Robert Ingersoll as its president. The nation's largest freethought organization, the ASU estimated total membership at 100,000 by 1887.⁶³ The ASU's influence on the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis likely came from Lieber, who as indicated earlier, had worked with Ingersoll in its earlier manifestation as the National Liberal League. Alongside activism, the freethought movement also generated newspapers and pamphlets. The Boston-based *Truth Seeker* and *Index* provided freethinkers a substantial publishing arm for their ideas.⁶⁴ While the national movement's growth appeared exponential, the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis increasingly suffered setbacks.

⁶¹ "A Miscellaneous Lot," *Indianapolis News*, August 11, 1882, p. 2, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles; "Current Condensed News," *Indianapolis News*, August 28, 1882, accessed November 8, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles. The title of the first article illustrates how the larger community, outside of freethought, viewed the society as an oddity.

⁶² "National Liberal League," *Index* (Boston, Massachusetts), February 8, 1877, p. 62, accessed November 8, 2015, Google Books; "National Liberal League," *Index* (Boston, Massachusetts), September 27, 1877, p. 458, accessed November 8, 2015, Google Books; "National Liberal League," *Index* (Boston, Massachusetts), October 25, 1877, p. 506, accessed November 8, 2015, Google Books.

⁶³ George E. Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought: Being the Work of the Truth Seeker, with the Natural History of its Third Editor*, Volumes One and Two (1929; reprint, New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1972), 390; "Secular Union Congress," *Indianapolis News*, October 15, 1887, p. 8, accessed November 11, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles.

⁶⁴ Warren, *American Freethought*, 22, 188; Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought*, 185-190.

In some respects, Philip Rappaport's resignation as society president in 1883 signaled the beginning of the end.⁶⁵ Their shift in the late 1880s into more educational initiatives through the Sunday school, the German-English School, and the Industrial Trade School moved their energies away from community outreach, advocacy, and membership growth. Also, younger German-Americans and German immigrants did not take to the older generation's ideas, even after many attempts by the society to cultivate their interest. As such, the society spread itself too thin and a lack of enthusiasm set in. After meager attempts at reform and reorganization, the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis formally dissolved in April of 1890. The organization divided its assets among multiple educational initiatives and charitable organizations within the German-American community.⁶⁶ Despite its success in the 1870s and 1880s, the Freethinker Society never escaped the stigma of being a "conflict movement," that is, a movement "typically supported by minorities or slim majorities of populations and [which] confront fundamental, organized opposition in attempting to bring about social change."⁶⁷ In short, the local movement within the German-American community lost its relevance to younger citizens and never established a clear purpose to keep existing beyond its current membership.

⁶⁵ As early as 1885, Clemens Vonnegut called for the dissolution of the society, over growing concerns that it had spread itself too thin (Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis*, 117).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 117-123.

⁶⁷ John D. McCarthy and Mark Wolfson, "Consensus Movements, Conflict Movements, and the Cooperation of Civic and State Infrastructures," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 273.

The national freethought movement, also paralleling the local movement of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, declined by the end of the nineteenth century. Robert Ingersoll's resignation as the president of the American Secular Union in 1886 triggered a multi-year weakening of the organization.⁶⁸ His death in 1899 further precipitated the Union's collapse and sent shockwaves throughout the rest of the freethought movement. Once the largest and most effective freethought organization in the country, the American Secular Union saw its membership go from 100,000 in 1887 to 40,000-50,000 by 1900.⁶⁹ Ten years later, the *Truth Seeker*, America's premier freethought newspaper, neglected to cover the ASU's convention and the organization "lapsed into a state of impotence from which it never emerged."⁷⁰ With the collapse of the American Secular Union, the Golden Age of Freethought essentially ended by the dawn of World War I.

Even as the movement lost steam, empowered individuals still engaged in activism, especially in Indianapolis. After the end of the Freethinker Society, Clemens Vonnegut continued his activism more than any former member, mostly through writing. *A Proposed Guide for Instruction of Morals*, published in 1900, enunciated Vonnegut's philosophy of freethought both in theory and in practice.⁷¹ This treatise also displayed a rhetorical flourish that a future member of the Vonnegut family would cite as an

⁶⁸ George E. Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought*, 413-414; Robert G. Ingersoll, *The Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll*, ed. Eva Ingersoll Wakefield (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1951), 649-650.

⁶⁹ Warren, *American Freethought*, 175.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Clemens Vonnegut, *A Proposed Guide for Instruction of Morals, From the Standpoint of a Freethinker, for Adult Persons, Offered by a Dilettante* (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1900, reprint edition 1987), Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Library, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives.

influence.⁷² Echoing Ingersoll and Heinzen before him, Vonnegut declared that, “No religious creed has any real proofs. It rests simply on assertions.”⁷³ However, that does not mean that humanity cannot be moral. In fact, Vonnegut argued the opposite:

True virtue is its own reward, which is not enhanced but rather misled by belief. Belief deprives us of the joys of this world by teaching us that we must detest them, and instead of them we must hope for a heaven. Belief forms the germ for persecution of those who differ from us in their religious convictions.⁷⁴

Vonnegut saw morality as the wellspring of the “intrinsic quality of human character which ought to be nourished and cultivated early, continually, and carefully.”⁷⁵ In subsequent pages, Vonnegut explained how such “cultivation” is achieved. Public education, family instruction, physical fitness, and social activities presented the means by which individuals perfected a moral life without the supernatural.⁷⁶ Like Ingersoll, Vonnegut’s morality was clear, traditional, based in the family, and demonstrated a moral life without the need of God, likely influenced by the Ingersoll lecture, *The Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child*. This particular lecture also championed a morality without god that was in the service of family, society, and country and emphasized education and self-determination.⁷⁷ While Clemens Vonnegut presented his philosophy clearly, the events surrounding his death were anything but.

Conclusion: The Strange Death and Freethought Legacy of Clemens Vonnegut

⁷² Kurt Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday, An Autobiographical Collage* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1981), 18.

⁷³ Vonnegut, *Proposed Guide for Instruction of Morals*, 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-14, 28-30.

⁷⁷ Robert Green Ingersoll, *The Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child* (New York: C.P. Farrell, Publisher, 1895), 98-110, accessed September 15, 2016, Google Books.

Clemens Vonnegut died in the snow . . . or so the story goes. Literature icon Kurt Vonnegut, Clemens's great-grandson, recalls this story in his autobiographical work, *Palm Sunday*. In the winter of 1906, Clemens Vonnegut supposedly went for a routine stroll. Having lost his way, he wandered the streets of Indianapolis for hours before he was found dead by the side of the road by a search party.⁷⁸ This story bewildered Kurt Vonnegut, whose own freethought can be traced to his great-grandfather and his own extended family. However, as with many family stories, this one stretches the truth a little.

Clemens Vonnegut did not die by the side of the road, but was rather found unconscious nearly five miles out of the city. He sustained injuries to his head and right shoulder, and doctors feared that exposure to the elements might be his biggest challenge.⁷⁹ After fighting for his life for five days, Clemens Vonnegut succumbed to pneumonia on January 13, 1906. True to his iconoclastic nature, Vonnegut wrote his own eulogy back in the 1870s and asked for its recitation when he died. In it, he railed against the creeds of Christianity:

I do not believe in the atonement to the blood of Christ or in the sin of incredulity. I do not believe in a punishment in a future life. I believe neither in a personal God nor a personal devil, but I honor the ideal which man has created as the tenor of all virtues and perfections, and has named God.⁸⁰

Until the very end, Vonnegut believed in the power of humanity to throw off the shackles of religion and embrace the values of inquiry and human-based ethics.

⁷⁸ Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 28.

⁷⁹ "Aged Man Wanders All Night in Cold," *Indianapolis News*, December 8, 1906, p.1.

⁸⁰ "Death has Come to Clemens Vonnegut, Sr.," *Indianapolis News*, December 13, 1906, p. 1; "No Hell, He Declared," *Indianapolis Star*, December 20, 1906, p. 1.

Nearly a century later, Kurt Vonnegut wrote that his great-grandfather's freethought was his own "ancestral religion" and that he was "pigheadedly proud" of the heretical nature of his family.⁸¹ Kurt Vonnegut, a future honorary president of the American Humanist Association, carried the torch of freethought for his grandfather, and in some respects, introduced his ideas to a new generation. In many of his works, Kurt would openly criticize religion, spirituality, and faith, so much so that it even ruined one of his marriages. Nevertheless, echoing his grandfather in a 1980 speech at the First Parish Unitarian Church, Vonnegut declared, "Doesn't God give dignity to everybody? No—not in my opinion. Giving dignity, the sort of dignity that is of earthly use, anyway, is something that only people do."⁸² In this statement may be Clemens Vonnegut's, and the Freethinker Society's, greatest legacy.

The Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, and the larger freethought movement, never achieved the long-term notoriety and influence that its members desired. However, it did leave a lasting impact.⁸³ The Freethinker Society paved the way for the Indiana Rationalist Association, which carried the torch of freethought into the early twentieth century.⁸⁴ Equally important, Clemens Vonnegut's writings and ideas profoundly influenced his family and the literary achievements of his great-grandson, Kurt

⁸¹ Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*, 194-195.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸³ As historian Sydney Warren noted, the freethought movement also collapsed due to competing ideas and advocacy programs and it fell out of the American mainstream around World War I (Warren, *American Freethought*, 169-170).

⁸⁴ For an excellent overview of the Indiana Rationalist Association, see Robert M. Taylor, Jr., "The Light of Reason: Hoosier Freethought and the Indiana Rationalist Association, 1909- 1913," *Indiana Magazine of History* 79, no. 2 (June 1983), 109-132, accessed October 2, 2014, IUScholarWorks.

Vonnegut.⁸⁵ The junior Vonnegut's own midwestern brand of freethought, in the form of what scholar Todd F. Davis called a "postmodern humanism," displayed a deep sense of skepticism about the irrationalism of his time while simultaneously championing an ethical responsibility to ourselves and each other devoid of supernatural influences.⁸⁶

Today, if you enter the offices of the Center for Inquiry Indiana, the Indianapolis-based freethought organization, you will see numerous portraits on the walls. Alongside tributes to historic freethinkers like astronomer Carl Sagan and businessman Bill Gates, two sets of portraits are prominent. One is the portrait of Robert Green Ingersoll, the historic infidel, and the other is a section devoted to the founding fathers of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis. In a row are Hermann Lieber, Philip Rappaport, Karl Beyschlag, and Clemens Vonnegut. This is not just a kind gesture. It is a testament to the solid foundation the German-Americans and Ingersoll built for future freethinkers and the enduring legacy of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis.

In chapter three, the story of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis and German-American freethinkers in the Midwest was explored, along with its connections to Robert Green Ingersoll's involvement in the national freethought movement and his specific connection to the Midwest. The German-American community in Indianapolis, influenced by freethought leaders like Ingersoll through their study of radicals Karl Heinzen and Alexander Humboldt, found its place within the freethought movement via education and advocacy. Specifically, Vonnegut's German translation of Ingersoll's

⁸⁵ Charles J. Shields, *And So It Goes: Kurt Vonnegut: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), 235, 377, 417-421.

⁸⁶ Todd F. Davis, *Kurt Vonnegut's Crusade, Or How a Postmodern Harlequin Preached a New Kind of Humanism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 34-36.

Open Letter to the Clergy of Indianapolis, Philip Rappaport's coverage of Ingersoll in the *Indiana Tribune*, and Hermann Lieber's work with Ingersoll for the National Liberal League emphasizes that the Indianapolis leaders were well acquainted with Ingersoll and his work. Additionally, the Society paralleled the rise and fall of the American freethought movement during the late nineteenth century, of which Ingersoll was a leader, organizer, and popularizer. With the Freethinker Society's dissolution in 1890 and Ingersoll's death in 1899, the national freethought movement, both within the German-American community and more broadly, began its descent into further obscurity. Nevertheless, the Society's connection to future freethinkers like author Kurt Vonnegut exemplified the ways in which the Society and Ingersoll served as an influence. Like Moody's connection to Ingersoll, the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis's connection to the larger freethought movement reaffirms Ingersoll's place as a public intellectual during the period whose own activism acted as a "prism" for believers and nonbeliever alike in the Midwest.

CHAPTER FOUR: INGERSOLL AND INDIANA

Introduction: A Tale of Two Hoosiers

Robert Ingersoll's intellectual sparring with the Reverend Dwight Moody and his influence on the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis exemplified only part of the agnostic's connection to the central Midwest. He also spent considerable time and energy in Indiana, a state whose own religious diversity expanded towards the late nineteenth century, including German Lutherans to Catholics and numerous Protestant denominations.¹ From giving lectures throughout the state to influencing some of Indiana's well-known historic figures, Ingersoll had a profound impact on the state and its development during the Gilded Age.² To get a sense of this influence, two particular stories bear recalling. The first involved a train ride with an old Civil War colleague and the second with a young man whose discovery of Ingersoll's lectures led to his own freethought.³

¹ James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 207; L.C. Rudolph, *Hoosier Faiths: A History of Indiana Churches and Religious Groups* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 25-33, 140-158.

² As an example, Ingersoll delivered lectures at the illustrious English's Opera House several times. The *Indianapolis News* wrote in 1899 that his lecture on "Superstition" was well attended and that "several people were shocked by the lecturer's utterances, and left, some of them stopping in the lobby to 'talk it over.' The remainder seemed to enjoy the talk" ("Robert Ingersoll's Lectures," *Indianapolis News*, January 30, 1899, p. 10, accessed February 4, 2015, Hoosier State Chronicles).

³ Tom Flynn, author and secular humanist, recalls these two stories in a lecture he wrote in 2003 called "Ingersoll and Indianapolis." This chapter expands on Flynn's lecture with new sources as well as further analysis. For the original lecture, see Tom Flynn, "Ingersoll and Indianapolis," presentation delivered by Norm Allen at Center for Inquiry Indiana, 2003, Center for Inquiry Indiana Archives.

Lew Wallace, Indiana native, Civil War general, and the author of the novel *Ben-Hur*, cites Ingersoll as his influence in writing the Christian epic. As Wallace biographers Robert and Katharine Morsberger noted, Wallace “had written the story [*Ben-Hur*] partly to refute Robert G. Ingersoll’s agnosticism....”⁴ The story surrounding this influence is taken for granted by scholars of both Ingersoll and Wallace. Lending to the story’s acceptance among scholars, Wallace indicated the story’s veracity in both his *Autobiography* and in the preface to a selection from *Ben-Hur* entitled *The First Christmas*.⁵

On September 19, 1876, both Wallace and Ingersoll supposedly shared a train ride to Indianapolis for the Third National Soldiers Reunion.⁶ Wallace recounted the highlights of their conversation in his preface to *The First Christmas*:

There was a great mass Convention of Republicans at Indianapolis in '76. I resolved to attend it, and took a *sleeper* [sic] from Crawfordsville the evening before the meeting. Moving slowly down the aisle of the car, talking with some friends, I passed the state-room. There was a knock on the door from the inside, and some one called my name. Upon answer, the door opened, and I saw Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll looking comfortable as might be considering the sultry weather.⁷

⁴ Robert E. Morsberger and Katharine M. Morsberger, *Lew Wallace: Militant Romantic* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), 293.

⁵ Lew Wallace, *The First Christmas: From “Ben-Hur”* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), vi, accessed January 31, 2016, Internet Archive; Lew Wallace, *An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), vi, accessed January 31, 2016, Internet Archive.

⁶ Morsberger and Morsberger, *Lew Wallace: Militant Romantic*, 298. Both had served the Union Army during the Civil War and fought in the battle of Shiloh. For more on their interaction during the war, see Robert Ingersoll, *The Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll*, ed. Eva Ingersoll Wakefield (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1951), 27-29.

⁷ Lew Wallace, *The First Christmas: From “Ben-Hur,”* vi.

From there, Wallace asked Ingersoll if he believed in the afterlife, the divinity of Christ, and the existence of God, with the Great Agnostic answering, “I don’t know, do you?”⁸ Wallace then asked Ingersoll to present his best case against the doctrines of Christianity, which the infidel did with “a melody of argument, eloquence, wit, satire, audacity, irreverence, poetry, brilliant antitheses, and pungent excoriation [concerning] believers in God....”⁹ Ingersoll’s views of both theological and biblical skepticism shook Wallace to the core, with the latter remarking that, “I was in a confusion of mind not unlike dazement.”¹⁰

Wallace’s own theological confusion, what he called “absolute indifference,” seemed spurred into action by Ingersoll’s words: “...as I walked into the cool darkness, I was aroused for the first time in my life to the importance of religion.”¹¹ Thus, Wallace began his own investigation into the doctrines and traditions of Christianity, culminating in the authorship of *Ben-Hur* and a “conviction amounting to absolute belief in God and the divinity of Christ.”¹² According to Wallace, his evening with Ingersoll led to a full conversion to Christianity and the writing of one of the most successful religious novels of the period.

However, the earliest this particular story appears is in an *Indianapolis News* article on September 15, 1883. This article described its source as an “intimate personal

⁸ Ibid., vi-vii.

⁹ Ibid., vii.

¹⁰ Ibid., viii.

¹¹ Ibid., ix.

¹² Ibid. This story continued into future newspaper articles as well; see “Stories of Authors,” *Sunday Evening Mail* (Terre Haute, Indiana), July 12, 1890, p. 1, accessed February 4, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles, and “Ingersoll and Easter,” *Indianapolis News*, April 19, 1898, p. 3, accessed February 4, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.

friend” of Wallace and recalled the story as Wallace had in *The First Christmas*. “For six years he [Wallace] thought, studied and searched. At the end of that time *Ben-Hur* was produced,” the source indicated.¹³ However, Wallace had worked on the novel from 1873-1880, long before the *Indianapolis News* article was published and the story gained momentum in the popular culture through Wallace’s own “recollections” as well as other newspaper articles.¹⁴

Furthermore, contrary to Wallace’s account, in a 1887 letter to Joseph Vardaman, Ingersoll wrote that was “never well acquainted with” Wallace and did “not remember ever to have had a conversation with him on the subject of religion....”¹⁵ Ingersoll also stressed that the story of their meeting appeared to him as “without the slightest foundation.”¹⁶ While Wallace’s recollections of encountering with Ingersoll may have been a fiction, the story’s enduring popularity among Wallace scholars (despite evidence to the contrary) speaks to Ingersoll’s reputation as an intellectual and rhetorical power. Even if they perhaps never met, Wallace may have found his own beliefs challenged and strengthened by Ingersoll’s arguments.

Unlike his supposed encounter with Lew Wallace, Ingersoll’s impact on a young Carl Fisher, future co-founder of the Indianapolis 500, elicited a more sympathetic following. As a boy, Fisher sold pamphlets of Ingersoll’s lectures, published by an

¹³ “Scratch Notes,” *Indianapolis News*, September 15, 1883, p. 1, accessed October 3, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.

¹⁴ Jon Solomon, *Ben-Hur: The Original Blockbuster* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 46-52.

¹⁵ Robert G. Ingersoll to Joseph K. Vardaman, September 1, 1887, reprinted in *Truth Seeker*, August 13, 1921: 518, Gordon Stein Collection of Robert Green Ingersoll, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

organization called the Ingersoll League. As historian Charles Leershen quipped, Fisher often read the lectures before selling them, ensuring that “rare was the customer who bought a copy not perceptibly pre-thumbed by its vendor.”¹⁷ Fisher gravitated toward one of Ingersoll’s most notable ideas during his years as a lecturer: the “Happiness Creed.”

Developed over many years, its first formulation appeared in Ingersoll’s 1876 lecture, “The Gods”:

Reason, Observation and Experience — the Holy Trinity of Science — have taught us that happiness is the only good; that the time to be happy is now, and the way to be happy is to make others so. This is enough for us.¹⁸

However, the version that Fisher likely read came from an 1882 audio recording of Ingersoll made by his friend, inventor Thomas Edison. It would later be reprinted in Ingersoll’s collected works. It read as thus:

While I am opposed to all orthodox creeds, I have a creed myself; and my creed is this. Happiness is the only good. The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make others so. This creed is somewhat short, but it is long enough for this life, strong enough for this world. If there is another world, when we get there we can make another creed. But this creed will certainly do for this life.¹⁹

¹⁷ Charles Leershen, *Blood and Smoke: A True Tale of Mystery, Mayhem and the Birth of the Indy 500* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 113, accessed January 31, 2016, Google Books.

¹⁸ Robert G. Ingersoll, “The Gods,” in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 1—*Lectures*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 79, accessed October 24, 2014, Project Gutenberg.

¹⁹ Robert Ingersoll, *What's God Got to Do with It?: Robert Ingersoll on Free Thought, Honest Talk and the Separation of Church and State*, ed. Tim Page (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2005), i, 135. The creed can also be found in Robert G. Ingersoll, *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 12—*Miscellany*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 4, accessed October 24, 2014, Project Gutenberg.

This creed served as the guiding philosophy of Fisher's life, so much so that when his success as a businessman brought him wealth, he owned Ingersoll's collected works and even gave them to friends.²⁰

Both Lew Wallace and Carl Fisher found their lives permanently altered by Robert Ingersoll, both through his intellectual heft as well as his oratorical flourish. However, their stories are not isolated incidents. This chapter demonstrates how Ingersoll added to a rich dialogue of religion and freethought in Indiana broadly and Indianapolis specifically, further showing his role as a public intellectual. Two key episodes displayed Ingersoll's views and how the public responded to them. The first involves his answers to four clergymen from Indianapolis, originally printed in the local freethought newspaper the *Iconoclast* and subsequently published in pamphlet form. The second, similar to his public dialogue with Moody, was Ingersoll's interactions with the minister, mathematician, and educator John P. D. John, whose own oratorical career focused on criticism of the Great Agnostic. As such, Ingersoll's spirited dialogues with clergy in Indiana further illustrates his role as a public intellectual who served as a prism to different religious ideas in the central Midwest during the late nineteenth century.

Ingersoll's "Answers to Indianapolis Clergy"

On March 10, 1883, the *Iconoclast*, a local freethought newspaper in Indianapolis founded by W.H. LaMaster, commenced publishing a series of answers to Indianapolis clergy by Robert Ingersoll.²¹ These responses would be republished in 1894 by LaMaster

²⁰ Charles Leershen, *Blood and Smoke*, 114; Jerry M. Fisher, *The Pacesetter: The Untold Story of Carl G. Fisher* (Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 1998), 5-7.

²¹ "Questions Proposed by Indianapolis Clergymen to Col. Ingersoll," *Iconoclast*, March 10, 1883, p. 3, Indiana State Library, Manuscript Collection. LaMaster founded the *Iconoclast* in 1882 and it ran until 1886. LaMaster was a freethinker in his own right,

in pamphlet form and additionally included in volume seven of Ingersoll's collected works.²² In the published dialogues, Ingersoll answers an array of philosophical and theological questions, specifically about the existence or nonexistence of Jesus Christ, the origin of life, and the implications of divine punishment, such as hell.²³ Ingersoll discussed these issues with both eloquence and intellectual rigor, further reflecting the diverse religious backgrounds of his questioners.

While the rationale behind this specific publication is unclear (other than a friendly relationship between Ingersoll and LaMaster), Ingersoll answered his critics routinely in the press throughout his years as a public freethinker.²⁴ In 1879, Chicago publisher Rhodes and McClure released a pamphlet entitled *Mistakes of Ingersoll and Ingersoll's Answers*, which compiled Ingersoll's critical lecture of the Old Testament, "Some Mistakes of Moses," along with responses by prominent clergy.²⁵ Another key dialogue between Ingersoll and his religious critics was his public exchange with the

who wrote in a republication of Ingersoll's answers to the Indianapolis clergy in 1893 that, "It is for the good and well being [sic] of the whole people that a natural religion should take place of a supernatural one" (Robert Ingersoll and W.H. LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll and the Genesis of Life by W.H. LaMaster* (Indianapolis: Vincent Publishing Company, 1894), 3.

²² Robert G. Ingersoll, "To the Indianapolis Clergy," in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 7—*Discussions*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 106-135, accessed October 24, 2014, Project Gutenberg.

²³ *Ibid.*, 106-125.

²⁴ One indicator of Ingersoll's intentions was a short column in the December 29, 1881, issue of the *Indianapolis News*, which noted that "Robert G. Ingersoll has announced his intention of answering a series of questions put to him by Revs. Myron W. Reed, David Walk, D. O'Donaghue, and Prof. Taylor, of this city." ("City News," *Indianapolis News*, December 29, 1881, p. 3, accessed June 11, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.)

²⁵ J. B. McClure, ed., *Mistakes of Ingersoll and Ingersoll's Answers* (Chicago: Rhodes & McClure, Publishers, 1879), 1-151, accessed September 25, 2014, Internet Archive.

celebrated judge and politician Jeremiah Black.²⁶ In this exchange, originally published in the *North American Review*, Black criticized Ingersoll as having “all imagination and no discretion” with regards to religion and that Christianity’s “doctrines are divinely revealed” and “its fundamental facts incontestably proved....”²⁷ Ingersoll even carried on a months-long exchange with Presbyterian minister Dr. Henry M. Field on the differences between “superstition and religion.”²⁸ Based on past public discussions with religious leaders in the press, Ingersoll’s response to the Indianapolis clergy is far from unprecedented.

The four “clergymen” that Ingersoll answered—the Reverend David Walk, the Reverend Myron W. Reed, Dr. T.B. Taylor, and the Reverend D. O’Donoghue—lived in Indianapolis and presided over their own unique religious communities. The Reverend David Walk served as pastor of the Central Christian Church in Indianapolis from 1881-1885.²⁹ A pillar of the community, he often gave the opening prayer for legislators in the Indiana General Assembly and for temperance advocates at the ninth annual meeting of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1882.³⁰ Walk belonged to the larger

²⁶ Jeremiah S. Black and Robert G. Ingersoll, “Ingersoll Demolished by Judge Black,” in *The Christian Religion* (Toronto: Morton and Company, 1881), 1-22, accessed January 15, 2015, Internet Archive.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁸ Robert G. Ingersoll and Henry M. Field, “The Ingersoll-Field Discussion,” in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 6—*Discussions*, ed. C. P. Farrell (Dresden, NY: Dresden Publishing Company, 1902), 119-218, accessed October 24, 2014, Project Gutenberg.

²⁹ “Biographical Sketch of David Walk,” in *Disciple of Christ*, Volume 2, no. 4 (April 1885): 209-210, accessed March 1, 2016, Google Books.

³⁰ *Journal of the Indiana State Senate during the Fifty-Third Session of the General Assembly, Commencing Thursday, January 4, 1883, Regular Session* (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford, Contractor for Public Printing, 1883), 259, accessed January 31, 2016, Google Books; *Minutes of the Ninth Annual Meeting, of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, of Indiana, Held at Indianapolis, May 15, 16, 17, and 18,*

denomination movement known as Disciples of Christ, and believed that “spiritual interests will not take care of themselves. Neglect of these, as well as of our temporal concerns, will be followed by bankruptcy.”³¹ Thus, Walk believed his congregants should be well rounded, spiritually connected as well as socially and economically conscious.

The Reverend Walk asked Ingersoll if, “the Character of Jesus of Nazareth, as described in the Four Gospels, [is] Fictional or Real?”³² Ingersoll’s answer is an interesting one: he believed that Jesus was a historical figure but also that he had been misinterpreted by the church. “All historical characters are, in part, deformed or reformed by fiction,” wrote Ingersoll in his answer to Walk. “It is the task of modern criticism,” Ingersoll argued, “to rescue these characters, and in the mass of superstitious rubbish to find the actual man.” Typical of even religious dissenters like Deists during his time, Ingersoll had a rather benign view of Christ as a figure but rejected the supernatural authoritarianism of Christianity as a belief system. As Ingersoll wrote, “To me, Christ the man is far greater than Christ the God.”³³

Myron W. Reed, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, lived in the capital city for seven years (1877-1884), where he cultivated friendships with many community leaders, including poet James Whitcomb Riley and philanthropist Oscar

1882 (Lafayette, IN: Our Herald Company, Printers, 1882), accessed March 1, 2016, Google Books.

³¹ David Walk, “Christian Service, and How to Render It. A Sermon,” in *Disciple of Christ*, Volume 2, no. 4 (April 1885), 211-215, accessed March 1, 2016, Google Books.

³² “Questions Proposed by Indianapolis Clergymen to Col. Ingersoll,” *Iconoclast*, 3; Ingersoll, “To the Indianapolis Clergy,” 106; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 5.

³³ “Questions Proposed by Indianapolis Clergymen to Col. Ingersoll,” *Iconoclast*, 3; Ingersoll, “To the Indianapolis Clergy,” 110; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 12.

McCulloch. He then moved to Denver and served as pastor of the First Congregational Church until his death in 1899.³⁴ He was known to the church community, both in Indianapolis and Denver, as an excellent storyteller and even published his own collection of sermons, *Temple Talks*, in 1898.³⁵ In a lecture called “A Return to Nature,” Reed appears more liberally minded than many of his religious contemporaries:

The most of the people who made the Bible did not have any sure hold on dinner. There were no pipes and wires nor order men. The means of life came direct. It was a good thing that Henry D. Thoreau did when he built his little cabin on the shore of Walden pond and proceeded to get his own living. Out of the earth and water and from the sky good thoughts came to him.³⁶

In other words, Reed acknowledged the fallibility of scripture and insisted that humanity’s connection to nature may also grant them spiritual guidance. Reed even supported socialism in another lecture (“I have lived to see socialism a respectable word and a socialist a respectable man.”) and served as president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, a philanthropic organization whose annual meetings were occasionally held in Indianapolis.³⁷ In many respects, Reed provided a more liberally minded Christianity for Ingersoll to respond to.

As such, Reed asked Ingersoll about the problem of pain in relation to an afterlife.

“If for these [who suffer] there is no life to come,” the Reverend inquired, “their

³⁴ “Myron Reed is Dead,” *Indianapolis News*, January 30, 1899, p. 1, accessed February 16, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.

³⁵ Myron W. Reed, *Temple Talks* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1898), accessed January 16, 2016, Google Books.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39; Isabel C. Barrows, ed., *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, at the Eighteenth Annual Session Held in Indianapolis, Ind., May 13-20, 1891* (Boston, MA: Press of George H. Ellis, 141 Franklin Street, 1891), ix, accessed February 16, 2016, Google Books.

existence is a mistake; but if there is a life to come, it may be that the sequel to the acts of the play to come will justify the pain and misery of this present time?”³⁸ Ingersoll responded that he did not “hold any god responsible for this fact—filled as it is with pain and joy. But it seems to me that an infinite God should so have arranged matters that the bad would not pass—that it would die with its possessor—that the good should survive....” As such, a pleasurable life is something a “man should give to his son, not the result of his vices, but the fruit of his virtues.”³⁹ Ingersoll’s ethical framework resulted from his commitment to the real world, as he saw it. In his view, the way to alleviate suffering should come from humanity on earth, throughout one’s own works of virtue during life, rather than the administration of justice in a supposed afterlife.

Less is known about Dr. T.B. Taylor through the sources available, but one lecture he delivered in Topeka, Kansas, in 1872 provides some insight into his theological proclivities. In this lecture, Taylor derides the more theologically liberal doctrines of Victoria Woodhull and preacher Henry Ward Beecher. Woodhull was extremely controversial during the late nineteenth century. Her ventures as a spiritualist and her political activism, especially with women’s suffrage and her 1872 presidential bid under the International Workingmen’s Association, aroused the ire of a public not accustomed to strong women. Woodhull also publicly outed a supposed affair that Beecher had with a woman, which almost led to Woodhull’s arrest.⁴⁰ Taylor’s lecture

³⁸ Ingersoll, “To the Indianapolis Clergy,” 125; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 29.

³⁹ Ingersoll, “To the Indianapolis Clergy,” 126-127; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 31.

⁴⁰ Amanda Frisken, *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1-10.

echoed many of the accusations against them, arguing instead that, “she does not represent the Spiritualists. Whom, then, does she represent? I will tell you, friends, whom she represents, viz.: A very large class of men and women calling them selves ‘Christians,’ who covertly practice what she openly endorses... [specifically, “free love” and women’s equality].”⁴¹ Taylor, of the four that Ingersoll answered, represented a more traditionally conservative version of Christianity, as indicated by his lecture on Woodhull. Moral matters were paramount in Taylor’s view of life and of religion.

Taylor asked Ingersoll about the origins of the universe, specifically, “how do you account for the origin of life on this planet without a ‘Creator’?”⁴² Ingersoll, ever the skeptic, answered with an honest reply: “I do not know. My belief is that the earth as it is, and as it was, taken in connection with influence of the sun, and of other planets, produced whatever has existed or does exist on the earth.”⁴³ While he may not have personally known about the origins of the universe (a question that continues throughout human discourse), Ingersoll does criticize the idea that it had to come from a god. As he writes:

⁴¹ T. B. Taylor, *Dr. Taylor’s Lecture, delivered at Constitution Hall, Topeka, Kansas, Nov. 10, 1872* (Topeka: Crane & Byron, Publishers, 1872), 9, 12, accessed March 1, 2016, Google Books.

⁴² “Questions Proposed by Indianapolis Clergymen to Col. Ingersoll,” *Iconoclast*, March 10, 1883, p. 3; Ingersoll, “To the Indianapolis Clergy,” 117; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 20.

⁴³ “Questions Proposed by Indianapolis Clergymen to Col. Ingersoll,” *Iconoclast*, March 10, 1883, p. 3; Ingersoll, “To the Indianapolis Clergy,” 117; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 20.

...of what use it is to search for a creator? The difficulty is thus not solved. You leave your creator as much in need of a creator as anything your creator is supposed to have created. The bottom of your stairs rests on nothing, and the top of your stairs leans upon nothing. You have reached no solution.⁴⁴

Ingersoll has brilliantly captured the problem for theists; if the universe needs a creator, does not the creator also need one? If that is the case, then the creator's need for creator goes on ad infinitum. For Ingersoll, it is much better to say "I do not know" than it is to propose an even more complicated answer.

The last of Ingersoll's questioners, the Reverend Denis O'Donaghue, served as Bishop of the diocese of Indianapolis. The only Catholic of the four, O'Donaghue was appointed "auxiliary bishop in 1900 and served until his appointment as bishop of Louisville [Kentucky] in 1910..."⁴⁵ Born November 30, 1848, in Daviess County, Indiana, O'Donaghue studied theology at St. Meinrad College, St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary (Bardstown, Kentucky), and the Sulpician Seminary in Montreal, Canada.⁴⁶ His St. Patrick's Day speech on March 17, 1900, exemplified his view of the permanency of the Catholic faith:

⁴⁴ Ingersoll, "To the Indianapolis Clergy," 118-119; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 21-22.

⁴⁵ Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1968), 464.

⁴⁶ "Indianapolis, Diocese of (Indianapolitana)," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 7, ed. Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Conde B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, John J. Wynne (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 744, accessed February 16, 2016, Google Books.

But, whatever her political vicissitudes have been, in one thing Ireland has been faithful to the teaching of the apostle [St. Patrick], whom her people love so well. No pretended reformer, coming forward with a creed and a church of his own manufacture and brand, was ever able to mislead the Irish people or lessen their veneration for the ancient faith.⁴⁷

While a Hoosier native, O'Donaghue cared passionately for the Irish homeland and his Catholicism, and this comes through in his questions to Ingersoll for the *Iconoclast*.

In his question, O'Donaghue furthered the ethical question between belief and unbelief. He related a story about two friends, Archibald and Jonathan, who were friends that cared for their current life and gave little concern for a next one. Jonathan "stole every dollar of his friend's wealth, leaving him penniless...." Jonathan then lived his life in opulence and joy, while his friend died in misery. The Reverend then asked Ingersoll, "What are we to think of the rule of life laid down by these men?" In other words, since there was supposedly no God to correct their transgressions, was Jonathan justified in his actions against Archibald?⁴⁸

Ingersoll exemplified his moral center in his answer to O'Donaghue. After arguing that O'Donaghue "seems to entertain strange ideas as to right and wrong," Ingersoll hits back against this type of moral relativism. He writes:

If the grave is the eternal home, would the Rev. Mr. O'Donaghue advise people to commit crimes in order that they may enjoy this life? Such is not my philosophy. Whether there is a God or not, truth is better than falsehood. Whether there is a heaven or hell, honesty is always the best policy. There is no world, and can be none, where vice can sow the seed of crime and reap the sheaves of joy.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Tomlinson Hall Meeting," *Indianapolis News*, March 17, 1900, p. 20, accessed February 26, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.

⁴⁸ Ingersoll, "To the Indianapolis Clergy," 132-133; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 37-38.

⁴⁹ Ingersoll, "To the Indianapolis Clergy," 134; Ingersoll and LaMaster, *An Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll*, 39.

Morality, in Ingersoll's view, only existed in the world of our experience, not some other region of supernatural attributes. True morality is doing the right thing because it is right, independent of some god's view of the matter. If a friend steals the wealth of another to live in opulence, that is an immoral action, because the other person loses what is rightfully theirs. As Ingersoll believed, there is no need to appeal to a divine authority; the matter is clear enough to evaluate with reason.

Ingersoll's answers to the Indianapolis clergy displayed his sense of morality, his clarity of reasoning, and his dedication to humanistic values. As a publication, the answers were very popular, both to English speaking audiences and with German language audiences as well. As indicated in chapter three, Clemens Vonnegut, a German-American businessman and leader within the Indianapolis freethought community, translated these answers into German for publication.⁵⁰ They also displayed, in both ideas and in tone, Ingersoll's approach to responding to those within organized Christianity. The *Iconoclast* newspaper ceased publication in 1886, but these answers personified the willingness of a local outlet to have rich and vigorous religious discussions for Indianapolis readers. It reasserts the capital city as a vibrant hub for freethought and religion, and its relationship to Ingersoll as a public intellectual, during the period.

John P. D. John: "Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?"

While these four men brought many challenges to the freethought of Ingersoll, which he answered thoroughly, the man whose mind and oratory matched Ingersoll in

⁵⁰ Robert G. Ingersoll, *Offener Brief an die Indianapoliser Geistlichkeit*. Uebersetzt von Clemens Vonnegut, Sr. [*Open Letter to the Clergy of Indianapolis*. Translated by Clemens Vonnegut, Sr.] (Milwaukee, WI: Freidenker Publishing Company, 188[?]), Indiana Pamphlet Collection, Indiana State Library.

both content and persuasion was John Price Durbin John. Born in 1843 in Brookville, Indiana, John's mind reflected both a theological commitment and a scientific, logical disposition. Gifted in mathematics, chemistry, and theology, he received an undergraduate degree from Brookville College, a master's from McKendree College, a Doctorate of Divinity from DePauw University, and a Doctorate in Law from Lawrence University. He taught mathematics from 1863-1872, served as professor at Brookville College from 1872-1876 and was president of Moore's Hill College from 1876-1882.⁵¹

In 1882, John started teaching mathematics at DePauw University, and his success during his time there led to his selection as president of the university in 1889. In his inaugural address, John stressed the need for a balance between knowledge and faith:

The chief justification for our existence must be, not alone the spread of knowledge...for that field is already well occupied by the secular school,—but for the spread of knowledge to be wielded for righteousness...the formation of character for the glory of God.⁵²

This eloquent defense of the balance between the intellectual and spiritual permeated all of John's writings, especially his lecture on Ingersoll.

John retired in 1895 from DePauw to devote the rest of his life to professional lecturing.⁵³ A short biography supplied by DePauw University noted that John delivered

⁵¹ "John Price Durbin John," *New York Times*, August 8, 1916, p. 9, accessed January 27, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times; Stephen Sargent Visher, *Indiana Scientists: A Biographic Directory and an Analysis* (Indianapolis: Indiana Academy of Science, 1951), 95.

⁵² John P.D. John, *Inauguration of President John P.D. John, Thursday, June 19, 1890* (Greencastle, IN: DePauw University, 1890), 31-32, Indiana State Library, Manuscript Collection.

⁵³ A small article in the *Indianapolis Journal* described this decision in detail: "There has been considerable speculation since Dr. John P.D. John tendered his resignation as president of DePauw University as to what he would do in the future. He was determined to enter the lecture field, and his first announcement was sent out yesterday. He has prepared a new lecture, 'Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?'"

lectures challenging Ingersoll over “500 times in three years.”⁵⁴ While this number may seem hyperbolic, it is safe to assume that John did perform this type of lecture, in many forms, throughout the 1880s and 1890s. For example, the *Plymouth Independent* noted in its schedule of events that, “John P. D. John will deliver his lecture as [sic] the M.E. church, Wednesday evening March 18. One feature makes his lecture of vast importance, is the fact that it is an answer to Robert Ingersoll.”⁵⁵

As another example, John delivered a similar lecture in Chicago on April 14, 1896. In the speech, John heavily criticized Ingersoll’s view that Christianity is “unscientific” and that it rested on faith. “It is urged that the Christian scheme is unscientific because it is superstitious; that is, it rests on faith,” John said to the audience in the Militant Church. Yet, in his view, science cannot abandon faith, because “science raises the level of human knowledge by induction, and the very essence of its induction is faith in the uniformity of nature and the continuity of its processes.” As such, John argued that, “If science can rest on faith without being unscientific, the Christian scheme may safely rest on the same foundation.”⁵⁶ This bridging of faith in science and faith in God clearly repudiated Ingersoll’s commitment to naturalism over supernaturalism.

This lecture is aimed especially at Colonel Robert Ingersoll and his agnostic teachings” (“Dr. John to Lecture,” *Indianapolis Journal*, July 14, 1895, p. 8, accessed July 21, 2015, Chronicling America).

⁵⁴ “John Price Durbin John,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1916, p. 9, accessed January 27, 2016, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times; “Chapter Two: DePauw University, 1884-1918: John P.D. John,” *DePauw University: A Personal History*, last updated 2016, accessed January 27, 2016, DePauw University Online.

⁵⁵ “Local Brevities,” *Plymouth Independent* (Plymouth, Indiana), March 14, 1896, p. 4, accessed February 27, 2016, Chronicling America.

⁵⁶ “Reply to ‘Pope Bob,’” *Indianapolis Journal*, April 15, 1896, p. 2, accessed February 2, 2016, Hoosier State Chronicles.

A distillation of these lectures was published in pamphlet form as *Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?*, which represented John's thoroughgoing critique of Ingersoll and agnosticism.⁵⁷ In some respects, the published version of the lecture from 1898 is one part lawyerly critique and one part Methodist evangelism. Many of John's criticisms of Ingersoll were inspired by Biblical higher criticism, most likely the result of his 1879 published lecture on the Old Testament, *Some Mistakes of Moses*.⁵⁸ In this lecture, Ingersoll railed against the Bible as the supposed word of God, particularly the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. "As a matter of fact," Ingersoll writes, "it seems to be well settled that Moses had nothing to do with these books, and that they were not written until he had been dust and ashes for hundreds of years."⁵⁹ Ingersoll deeply believed that Christianity should be evaluated with reason, and that revelation was not sufficient to explain his natural world. "Theology," Ingersoll argued, "is not what we know about God, but what we do not know about Nature."⁶⁰

It was this kind of religious literalism that John P.D. John emphatically rejected in *Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?*. In his introduction, John wrote that the "agnostic philosopher who supposes that God did not make his appearance until he was summoned by men is an eternity behind time."⁶¹ John's point here is to distinguish between the God as understood by Ingersoll, meaning a myth, and John's conception,

⁵⁷ John P. D. John, *Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?: A Reply to Robert G. Ingersoll* (Indianapolis: Frank Caldwell, Publisher, 1898), accessed November 15, 2014, Internet Archive.

⁵⁸ Robert Ingersoll, *Some Mistakes of Moses* (1879. Reprint, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶¹ John P. D. John, *Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?*, 5.

which is equally his own but actualized in reality. “I do not forget that every man has his own ideal of God...,” John emphasized, but “the question now is, whether back of every man’s ideal of God there is a real being not made by men....”⁶²

Where the two men shared agreement was in the use of human reason to reach their conclusions. As John further wrote, “The man who doubts with the reason which God has given him; and I will insult neither man nor God by sneering at honest doubt.”⁶³ Ingersoll could have easily uttered this himself. In *Some Mistakes of Moses*, Ingersoll said, “We are told that we have the privilege of examining it for ourselves; but the privilege is only extended to us on the condition that we believe it whether it appears reasonable or not.”⁶⁴ They are clearly products of their time; the nineteenth century’s emphasis on rationality and open evaluation of claims puts them both closer to doubt than to certainty.⁶⁵ However, John could not accept complete doubt when it came to the question of God, particularly the God of Christianity.

Later in the book, John utilized his reason to criticize the Bible as a book of revelation. “...I make the admission in advance that so far as the Bible is a human book, it is liable to human imperfections,” he exclaimed.⁶⁶ Yet, John went further with his exegesis of the Bible. In another passage that could have also been written by Ingersoll, John noted:

Now, turn every light of criticism upon the Bible. Turn on the light of nature; and if science shall discover anything that is contradicted by

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴ Ingersoll, *Some Mistakes of Moses*, 41.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of this period, see Mitchell Stephens, *Imagine There’s No Heaven: How Atheism Created the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 163-177.

⁶⁶ John P. D. John, *Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?*, 12.

nature, take it out of the Bible, for God did not put one thing in nature and another in the Book. But be very sure that what science seems to see is a fact; and then be even doubly sure that the fact does in reality collide with the Book.⁶⁷

John's version of Christianity relied far more on direct revelation and faith than on the Biblical account. His reasoning seems rooted in his scientific, mathematical mind, one educated in a more liberally minded version of Christianity. In this respect, the two orators are actually closer in method than they are in message.

In another light, this passage is also a criticism of modern science. In effect, he is asking if there are things in the Bible that *do* contradict what humanity learns from nature. Thus, skepticism of science's supposed superiority over revealed religion provided an indispensable tool to John's theology. This puts him squarely in the theological tradition of supernatural rationalism, championed by New Englander John Wise.⁶⁸ Wise believed that "reason is congenate with [man's] nature, wherein a law immutable, enstamp'd upon his frame, God has provided a rule for men in all their actions," and that "revelation is nature's law in a fairer and brighter edition."⁶⁹ John's belief in the general revelation of nature and the special revelation of scripture fit within a more liberal tradition of Christianity that accommodated a synthesis of science with religion.

Nevertheless, John did believe in God and the revelation of Jesus Christ, and claimed that view using faith and appeals to virtue. "If the clods were our origin," wrote John, "the clods will be our destiny. But if we had our origin in the eternal purpose of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁸ Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Utilitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955), 135.

⁶⁹ John Wise, as quoted in Wright, *Beginnings of Utilitarianism in America*, 136.

God, we shall have our endless destiny in him.”⁷⁰ John appealed to the glory of eternity within the Christian framework, alongside a personal connection, as his evidences. Thus, “Reason will not need to climb by slow and painful ascent the steepening summits of truth, but with godlike majesty it will swoop upon the greatest thoughts.”⁷¹ His broader criticism of Ingersoll evolved out of the agnostic’s rejection of the supernatural, and the existence of the Christian god, through only judging the Bible and other believers. The Gospel as the sweeping and broad teachings of the faith should be considered, rather than specific criticisms that miss the overall message of Christianity. As John wrote in the last sentence of *Did Man Make God or Did God Make Man?*, “Whoever or whatever undertakes to outrun the Gospel of Jesus Christ must measure footsteps with the Eternal God.”⁷²

While John’s lecture proved successful with audiences, Robert Ingersoll may have never addressed John’s criticisms in a public presentation. However, Ingersoll responded to John’s lecture in letters. In particular, Ingersoll responded to a claim that he wrote that “Rev. John P. D. John is the only man who has ever answered me [Ingersoll],” in a letter he wrote to publisher E. M. Macdonald in 1898. Ingersoll stressed that he “Never wrote anything like it—nor said, anything like it,” and that, “I may have written or said, or both, that he was fair and decent, but it never occurred to me that he had really answered me.”⁷³

⁷⁰ John P. D. John, *Did Man Make God, or Did God Make Man?*, 90.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷³ R.G. Ingersoll to E.M. Macdonald, April 5, 1898, in Appendix to E.M. Macdonald, *Col. Robert G. Ingersoll As He Is* (New York: Truth Seeker Company, 1896 [Third Edition, 1910]), 195, accessed March 1, 2016, Google Books.

Ingersoll's congenial tone in his letter was completely offset by Macdonald's piercing thoughts following the letter:

There is the answer under the Colonel's own signature, and if the Rev. Pedee [sic] John and his advertising manager don't reform their show bills they will be open to the charge of willful misrepresentation for the glory of God, or of the Rev. Pedee, which is the same thing.⁷⁴

In some respects, this postscript may have been a friend defending a fallen comrade (Ingersoll died in 1899), but John is still incorrect. From Moody, to the four clergymen above, and Lew Wallace, many people answered Ingersoll's agnosticism, both in print and in lectures.

Ingersoll and John represented clear lines of belief and disbelief during the late nineteenth century. Both believed that their beliefs and pronouncements were in accordance with human reason and logical argumentation. John's "reasonable Christianity," which allowed for scientific advances and social evolution, still adhered to a faith in Christ. In stark contrast, Ingersoll believed that superstition harmed the world and that science and spirituality were not compatible. While differing slightly, both men presented strong arguments with rhetorical flourish and popularized ideas within the culture, stressing again that Ingersoll was a public intellectual and that his critics were often as eloquent and nuanced as he was.

Conclusion: The Infidel Hoosier Schoolteacher

Ingersoll expressed his views in the public square, allowing the populace to decide for themselves who was right. Did they reach the public? One indication that they did is a series of letters to and from a young lady named Mattie Ramsey Clapp. A

⁷⁴ Ibid.

schoolteacher in Scott County during the 1870s, she received letters criticizing her freethought and her appreciation of Robert Ingersoll.⁷⁵ In a November 10, 1880 letter to Clapp, an acquaintance named simply “Frank” answers her question about his view of Ingersoll. While the gentleman praised Ingersoll as a “smart man, a fine orator, and a good scholar,” he nonetheless decried the agnostic’s type of followers as “the murderer, the libertine, the lecherous scamp, the harlot....”⁷⁶ This answer likely was not what the young teacher wanted to hear, mostly because she was shifting away from religion. In that same letter, her correspondent quoted her words from a previous letter: “I cannot believe anything unless I understand it.”⁷⁷ His reply displayed both young Clapp’s ambivalence towards religion and his desire to bring her back into the fold.

Clapp also openly wrote about her freethought to her future husband, J. Valentine Clapp. In a letter from Christmas Day, 1884, Mattie Ramsey Clapp underlines “reason” and “observation” in a passage, and in an April 4, 1885, letter she wrote that, “if Easter can not inspire an infidel, love can inspire me—love that needs no resurrection....”⁷⁸

These passing remarks speak to how prevalent freethought’s ideas, especially Ingersoll’s ideas, were in the social consciousness of the late nineteenth century. If a schoolteacher in rural Indiana could reject the supposed revelations of Christianity, then these ideas carried weight with the broader culture. From his theological questioners, to a highly

⁷⁵ “Biographical Sketch,” in Mattie Ramsey Clapp Papers, 1878-1903, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁷⁶ “Frank” to Mattie Ramsey, November 10, 1880, Mattie Ramsey Clapp Papers, 1878-1903, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Mattie Ramsey to J. Valentine Clapp, December 25, 1884, Mattie Ramsey Clapp Papers; Mattie Ramsey to J. Valentine Clapp, April 4, 1885, Mattie Ramsey Clapp Papers (underlines in original).

educated, yet faithful debater, to a young woman from Scott County, Indiana, Ingersoll's ideas animated and influenced the central Midwest. His commitment to reason, nature, and humanity inspired both followers and thoughtful critics from throughout the state of Indiana to respond to him with argument and evidence, which further displayed the heterogeneity of belief and nonbelief during the period.

Chapter Four analyzed Robert Ingersoll's role as a public intellectual within Indiana during the Gilded Age. His public dialogues with Indiana religious leaders and his influence on the general public, as demonstrated by the letters of Mattie Ramsey, reinforced his impact on religion and freethought in the central Midwest during the period. His answers to the Indianapolis clergy, in particular, showed his role as a "prism" for the multitudes of religious views during the period, when he shared his estimation of religion and compelled them to respond. His interactions with John P.D. John, much like his interactions with Dwight Moody, also underscore this facet of Ingersoll as a public intellectual. In all, Ingersoll's interactions in Indiana and Indianapolis show his stature as a synthesizer of ideas that animated his critics and celebrators to respond in a myriad of ways in the central Midwest during the late nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION: LEGACIES

When Robert Ingersoll died on July 21, 1899, it did not take long for spiritualists to emerge with narratives of his supposed immortality. As the *Chicago Tribune* reported on July 24, 1899, Mrs. Cora L.V. Richmond had summoned Ingersoll from the afterlife, claiming that the freethinker “always longed for one [an afterlife] and never felt satisfied with his philosophy when standing by the side of an open grave.”¹ This supposed revelation got Ingersoll’s views on death completely wrong. In the *Chicago Tribune* the day before, Ingersoll was quoted at length about how he understood death:

Death is not all evil. It sweeps the finest chords of that wonderful harp which we call the human soul as nothing else could do. There are two great master musicians that play upon our hearts—love and death. And I look at death as the greater of the two. If there were no death in the world there would be no love.²

As he had for decades, Ingersoll (posthumously) set the record straight about his views of death. However, this was not the end of the controversy.

Over the years, many also claimed that he had converted on his deathbed to Christianity, rebuking the decades of his own apostasy. For the next seven years, preachers all over the country repeated this misstatement through the press. The worst episode came in April of 1903, when a preacher from Lynn, Massachusetts, claimed that he heard of the conversion from Ingersoll’s own daughter, Maud.³ Hoping to put the

¹ “Ingersoll Through a Medium,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 24, 1899, p. 1, accessed August 6, 2015, Library of Congress, Newspaper Microfilm Collection.

² “Col. Ingersoll Dies Poor,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 23, 1899, p. 1, accessed August 6, 2015, Library of Congress, Newspaper Microfilm Collection

³ Orvin Larson, *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll* (1962. Reprint, Madison WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation, Inc., 1993), 274-275.

rumor to rest, Ingersoll's daughter Eva, his publisher's wife Sue M. Farrell, and his friend Sue Sharkey all wrote a public statement denying any such conversion. "It is said that he recanted. This is a cruel and malicious falsehood without the slightest foundation in fact," the statement read. "His convictions on the subject of religion remained absolutely unchanged. He died as he had lived, an Agnostic." It was even notarized by Notary Public John H. Hazelton.⁴ Despite all the rumors, Ingersoll was not a Christian, nor was he immortal; to all who saw it his way, he was gone forever.

With his iconoclastic voice finally silenced by the final curtain of death, what would be his legacy? The legacy of Ingersoll, in some respects, began with his most vocal successor, lawyer Clarence Darrow. At a ceremony on August 6, 1899, Darrow declared that:

Robert G. Ingersoll was a great man, a wonderful intellect, a great soul of matchless courage, one of the great men of the earth—and yet we have no right to bow down to his memory simply because he was great. . . . Great orators, great lawyers, often use their gifts for a most unholy cause. . . . We meet to pay a tribute of love and respect for Robert G. Ingersoll. . . . because he used his matchless powers for the good of man.⁵

With such kind and thoroughgoing remarks, Darrow appeared to many as Ingersoll's heir apparent. Born in Ohio in 1857, Darrow, like Ingersoll, grew up in a religious home but lost his faith over the years studying the Bible, philosophy, and ethics.⁶ Also like Ingersoll, Darrow finally settled on calling him an agnostic, arguing that, "I am agnostic

⁴ Eva A. Ingersoll, Sue Sharkey, and Sue M. Farrell, *Robert G. Ingersoll: The True Story of His Illness and Death* (Reprint, 1929. New York: Freethinkers Society of New York), 3.

⁵ Clarence Darrow, as quoted in Larson, *American Infidel*, 273-274.

⁶ S.T. Joshi, *The Unbelievers: The Evolution of Modern Atheism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011), 103; Donald McRae, *The Last Trials of Clarence Darrow* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 151-152.

as to the question of God. I think that it is impossible for the human mind to believe in an object or thing unless it can form a mental picture of such object or thing.” As such, an agnostic using these tenets “cannot be said to believe in God.”⁷

Darrow, a successful lawyer and civil rights advocate, came to national prominence during the Scopes “Monkey” Trial of 1925. The trial was spurred by John Scopes, a teacher in Rhea County High School who declared his guilt of teaching evolution (for the benefit of the American Civil Liberties Union), in direct violation of the Tennessee’s anti-evolution law. The trial became the intellectual sparring match of both Darrow (who with Dudley Field Malone, defended Scopes) and his foil, William Jennings Bryan (who helped represent the state of Tennessee).⁸ Bryan, like Darrow, had been a successful lawyer and public servant, running for president three times and serving as President Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of State.⁹ Yet, unlike Darrow, Bryan was a committed Presbyterian who believed in a more fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and the origins of the earth and all its life. Ironically, Bryan had also had a period of doubt, and even wrote a letter to Ingersoll asking of his opinion. When Bryan examined Ingersoll’s views and his own, he stayed committed to his faith.¹⁰

The trial lasted for 11 days in the sweltering July heat of Dayton, Tennessee, with national coverage from both radio and newspapers. H.L. Mencken, the Baltimore journalist and celebrated iconoclast, covered the trial for his newspaper and wrote rather

⁷ Clarence Darrow, “Why I Am an Agnostic,” in *The Agnostic Reader*, ed. S.T. Joshi (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), 71.

⁸ McRae, *The Last Trials of Clarence Darrow*, 162-165.

⁹ Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1971), 251-254, 343-346, 454-456, 503-551.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

sardonically about the religious beliefs of the state and its chief lawyer, Bryan.¹¹ Throughout the trial, Darrow defended the right to intellectual freedom and Bryan tried to poke holes in evolutionary theory and defended the Biblical view of creation.¹² The proceedings came to a head when Bryan decided to take the stand and be cross examined by Darrow. It was here that the two men, agnostic and believer, sparred about the veracity of the Bible. During cross-examination, Bryan displayed his view; any contradictions or lack of evidence that invalidated his interpretation of Christianity would be ignored or evaded.¹³ “I believe in creation as there told,” Bryan declared,” and if I am not able to explain it I will accept it.”¹⁴ Bryan’s failure to adequately defend his own version of Christianity to the larger court of public opinion shocked the fundamentalists, who believed he was their greatest spokesman.¹⁵ While Scopes’ conviction was later dropped under a technicality in a higher court, it nonetheless put the evolution versus creation, rationalism versus religion debate front and center in way it had not been since the late nineteenth century. Like Robert Ingersoll and Dwight Moody a generation before, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan used the power of oratory and argument to defend their positions against each other, thus furthering the national dialogue on religion in public life.

As for Moody, his evangelical legacy influenced one of America’s most popular and respected religious leaders, the Reverend Billy Sunday, as well as the successful

¹¹ S.T. Joshi, *The Unbelievers*, 108; Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 154-155.

¹² McRae, *The Last Trials of Clarence Darrow*, 186-200

¹³ Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 3-6, 187-189

¹⁴ William Jennings Bryan, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁵ It did not help that Bryan died five days after the trial. (*Ibid.*, 200-203).

Moody Bible Institute (originally named the Chicago Evangelization Society). Sunday, who was born and raised in Iowa, started life as a professional baseball player before his conversion in 1880s.¹⁶ In the 1890s, Sunday learned the craft of evangelizing within apprenticeships with the Chicago Y.M.C.A. (of which Moody was a co-founder), and by 1896 had become a professional evangelist.¹⁷ For the next 40 years, Sunday preached a Presbyterianism that represented “the more ‘American’ side of that denominational tradition—a broad, somewhat tolerant, not highly doctrinal, moralistic, patriotic, and often optimistic version of evangelical Protestantism.”¹⁸

However, there was one aspect of Sunday’s sermons that were influenced by Ingersoll a bit too literally. During the 1910s, Sunday was found of plagiarizing parts or entire lectures of Robert Ingersoll. Historian W. A. Firstenberger noted that *Sunday U-N-M-A-S-K-E-D*, a book critical of the evangelist, published Sunday’s Decoration Day lecture next to Ingersoll’s from 1882. The two were nearly identical. Sunday also kept issues of the *Iconoclast*, a freethought newspaper, and an edited collection of Ingersoll’s quotes and lectures in his library.¹⁹ Furthermore, a contemporary article from the Reverend Orman T. Headley also accused Sunday of plagiarism. In the June 14, 1915 issue of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Headley wrote:

¹⁶ Billy Sunday, *The Sawdust Trail: Billy Sunday in His Own Words*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 67.

¹⁷ Lyle W. Dorsett, *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 39-57.

¹⁸ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of the Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 135.

¹⁹ W. A. Firstenberger, *In Rare Form: A Pictorial History of Baseball Evangelist Billy Sunday* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 32, accessed December 17, 2016, Google Books.

With such a super-religious man as Sunday does not his conscience cringe before such plagiarism—the besetting sin (or crime) of authors and orators. *Harper's Weekly* quoted Billy Sunday's sermon and Ingersoll's lecture and it was verbatim, word for word, and then gave Sunday's defense of himself when he was charged with it. He merely replied, “I did not know that was said by Ingersoll.” Now does his lack of knowledge of who the author was justify his appropriating it as his own? I would like to hear what defense can be put up for Sunday on this score.²⁰

This scathing indictment of Sunday's plagiarism came from within Christianity, carrying with it supposedly less confirmation bias than a freethought publication. Yet, Sunday never let it phase him nor did it hurt his popularity. His “sensational and vaudevillian” style urged personal responsibility and growth, which he actively worked for in his urban evangelizing campaigns.²¹ From Sunday's style of Americanized evangelism, one can easily see a connection to more modern evangelicals like the Reverend Billy Graham.²²

Where Moody succeeded far more than his freethinker contemporaries was in building a legacy project that continues to this day, with a series of theological schools called the Moody Bible Institute (MBI). A “corporate evangelical network,” led by Moody himself, founded the Chicago Evangelization Society in 1886.²³ Its mission was to create a network that would “convert the working classes and restore social stability” amid the labor unrest in Chicago during the late nineteenth century.²⁴ When Moody died in 1899 (the same year as Ingersoll's death), Henry Parsons Crowell and a consortium of

²⁰ Orman T. Headley, “Billy Sunday Again,” in *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 127, no. 25 (June 24, 1915): 779, accessed December 17, 2016, Google Books.

²¹ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 78, 126.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

²³ Timothy E. W. Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: Fundamentalism, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

Christian businessmen envisioned a new task for the newly renamed Moody Bible Institute, one focused on middle-class families and the culture of “consumption.”²⁵ These new “Corporate evangelicals” restructured American religious life away from “corporate bodies (churches) affiliated with denominations that functioned largely on democratic principles to a radically individualistic basis of religious authority, with believers loosely corralled by religious organizations structured like corporations.”²⁶ Modern evangelicalism, as seen by pastors like Billy Graham, traced their successes back to the corporate organizational power of entities like the MBI. In a sense, Billy Sunday and the Moody Bible Institute, much like Bryan and Darrow’s public debates, continued a national conversation on religion in public life, as Ingersoll and Moody himself had done a generation before.

While Moody and the evangelicals of the Midwest certainly had their effect on American culture, the freethinkers of the Midwest could say the same. Indiana’s Eugene V. Debs, a friend of Ingersoll, labor activist, and Socialist Party candidate for president, deeply admired Ingersoll’s intellect and moral outrage concerning the lesser angels of Christianity.²⁷ Reflecting on Ingersoll after his death, Debs wrote to publisher C.P. Farrell that “I have never loved another mortal as I have loved Robert Ingersoll, and I never shall another. . . .”²⁸ Another Indiana freethinker, Evansville’s J.A. Lemcke, wrote that:

The capsule containing the story of the creation, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, the immaculate conception, and all the innumerable miracles, so eagerly swallowed by the faithful, will not go down with me; I prefer the conclusions evolved from the study of nature’s

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 18, 23.

²⁷ Eugene V. Debs to C.P. Farrell, in Robert G. Ingersoll, *The Letters of Robert G. Ingersoll*, ed. Eva Ingersoll Wakefield (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1951), 504.

²⁸ Eugene V. Debs to C.P. Farrell, January 17, 1900, Ibid.

secrets by scientific methods, to the dicta of religious soothsayers and dogmatic expounders of the unknown and the unknowable.²⁹

Lemcke, like Darrow and Debs, was content with uncertainty and disillusioned with traditional views of religion, particularly Christianity. As such, a reflection like his could have easily been something written by Ingersoll only years before.

With regards to freethinkers in the German-American community in Indianapolis, its biggest legacy is author Kurt Vonnegut. Kurt Vonnegut's connections to freethought go deeper than his great-grandfather, Clemens Vonnegut, the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis co-founder and Ingersoll enthusiast. His father, renowned architect Kurt Vonnegut, Sr., married Edith Lieber, of the illustrious Lieber family. Hermann Lieber, successful art dealer and co-founder of the Freethinker Society of Indianapolis, was Edith's great-great uncle.³⁰ Growing up, the junior Kurt Vonnegut received his religious instruction not from his parents, but from his nanny and housekeeper Ida Young. She would often read him Bible passages, exposing him to her interpretation of Christianity. In contrast, his parents only took the children to Unitarian-based services twice a year. Biographer Charles J. Shields quotes Vonnegut as saying these church attendances were merely a "theatrical event."³¹ The often-contradictory nature of his upbringing influenced Kurt Vonnegut's complicated position towards religion and spirituality.

²⁹ J.A. Lemcke, *Reflections of an Indianan: From the Sassafras Log Behind the Barn in Posey County to Broader Fields* (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1905), 83, accessed November 17, 2015, Google Books. The author is indebted to Clifton J. Phillips for the discovery of J.A. Lemcke. See Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1968), 461-462.

³⁰ Charles J. Shields, *And So It Goes: Kurt Vonnegut: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), 421-422.

³¹ Kurt Vonnegut, as quoted in Shields, *And So It Goes*, 17.

In many of his letters, his complex interrelationships between the sacred and profane often appeared. While Vonnegut would often reassert his freethought (“Trained in agnosticism and the social sciences, I find superficial and obvious explanations for whatever whenever possible....”), he nonetheless appealed to ecclesiastical ephemera, at least in metaphor.³² In a November 28, 1967, letter to the Massachusetts Draft Board #1 (at the height of the Vietnam War), Vonnegut wrote this about the relationship between the God concept and war:

This attitude toward killing [war through drafting soldiers] is a matter between my God and me. I do not participate much in organized religion. I have read the Bible a lot. I preach, after a fashion. I write books which express my disgust for people who find it easy and reasonable to kill.

We say grace at meals, taking turns. Every member of my large family has been called upon to thank God for blessings which have been ours. What Mark is doing now [his son, seeking conscientious objector status] is in the service of God, whose son was exceedingly un-warlike.³³

Notice the phrase, “my God”; the distinction between the “God” of common American experience and Vonnegut’s conception stresses his humanism. Much like his great-grandfather’s use of a God as an ideal in his 1906 eulogy (see above), Kurt Vonnegut used the language of Christianity metaphorically as an explication of his personal disgust of violence.

His most popular novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), also reinforces Vonnegut’s strong abhorrence of war and a belief in a common humanity. Specifically, “so it goes” is a phrase that Vonnegut peppered throughout the novel, often after horrible events or even

³² Kurt Vonnegut to Ben Hitz, Undated, Spring, 1980, in Kurt Vonnegut, *Letters*, ed. Dan Wakefield (New York: Dial Press, 2012), 399.

³³ Kurt Vonnegut to Draft Board #1, Selective Service, November 28, 1967, in Vonnegut, *Letters*, 140-141.

banal ones. This phrase shows no matter how bad things get, no matter how high one can get, the world (and indeed the universe) goes on. As an example, this passage from the novel, describing the protagonist Billy Pilgrim's memory of a sculpture of Jesus, is fairly apt:

A military surgeon would have admired the clinical fidelity of the artist's rendition of all Christ's wounds—the spear wound, the thorn wounds, the holes that were made by the iron spikes. Billy's Christ died horribly. He was pitiful.
So it goes.³⁴

“So it goes” becomes the novel's panacea; a way for the narrator to deal with the grim realities of war without the comfort of religious beliefs. In some respects, it can be seen as a mantra for humanism.

Recalling again his metaphorical religiosity, Vonnegut did have a radically humanistic view of Jesus Christ, even though he did not identify as a Christian.³⁵ Writing in one of his last books, *A Man Without A Country*, Vonnegut outlined his view of Jesus as a character of moral and historical importance. “How do humanists feel about Jesus?” wrote Vonnegut. “I say of Jesus, as all humanists do, ‘If what he said is good, and so much of it is absolutely beautiful, what does it matter if he was God or not?’”³⁶ Later in the book, Vonnegut calls Jesus the “greatest and most humane of human beings” and waxes mournfully about modern Christians' inability to emphasize the Sermon on the

³⁴ Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dial Press, 1969), 48.

³⁵ He emphasized his non-Christianity in a 1979 letter to Nanny Vonnegut about his future wedding to Jill Kremenetz: “It [the wedding] will be as secular as I can make it, since I am not a Christian of any kind.” (Kurt Vonnegut to Nanny Vonnegut, September 9, 1979, in Vonnegut, *Letters*, 266.)

³⁶ Kurt Vonnegut, *A Man Without a Country* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 80-81.

Mount, specifically the beatitudes.³⁷ “For some reason,” Vonnegut continues, “the most vocal Christians among us never mention the Beatitudes.... ‘Blessed are the merciful’ in a courtroom? ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ in the Pentagon? Give me a break!”³⁸ To Vonnegut, Christ should be seen as a moral ideal, not a prophet or a savior, much the way his great-grandfather saw the meek and mild carpenter from Nazareth. Thus, Jesus becomes an icon of humanism, rather than a figure of religious devotion.

True to his roots, Kurt Vonnegut carried his humanism through to the end of his life. In an address he prepared for April 27, 2007 (he died on April 11; his son Mark gave the address in his stead) for Indianapolis’s “Year of Vonnegut” celebrations, Kurt Vonnegut espoused his continued commitment to humanism:

Am I religious? I practice a disorganized religion. I belong to an unholy disorder. We call ourselves “Our Lady of Perpetual Consternation.” We are as celibate as fifty percent of the heterosexual Roman Catholic clergy.

Actually—and when I hold up my right hand like this, it means I’m not kidding, that I give my Word of Honor that what I’m about to say is true. So actually, I am honorary President of the American Humanist Society, having succeeded the late, great science fiction writer Isaac Asimov in that utterly functionless capacity. We Humanists behave as well as we can, without any expectation of rewards or punishments in an Afterlife. We serve as best we can the only abstraction with which we have any real familiarity, which is our community.³⁹

This emphasis on “community” squares nicely with Clemens Vonnegut’s own commitments to community, both with the Freethinker Society and with his advocacy of public education. They both understood that the values of sociality and comradery are

³⁷ Ibid., 95.

³⁸ Ibid., 98.

³⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Armageddon in Retrospect* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2008), 19-20.

essential to the flourishing of a community, and you can achieve that system without a supernatural element.

Clemens Vonnegut's humanism, as influenced by thinkers such as Karl Heinzen, Thomas Paine, and Robert Ingersoll, carried through many generations of his family and left an indelible mark on Kurt Vonnegut. The Vonneguts' rejection of religion and supernatural beliefs reinforced their love for humanity, their desire for community, and their commitment to the truth, no matter how horrifying it may be. Kurt Vonnegut's own success as a writer and social critic would have delighted his great-grandfather Clemens Vonnegut, who participated in many of the same literary pursuits freethought activism before Kurt Vonnegut was born. As such, their two lives, separated by time, nevertheless becoming entwined by their ideals. Their humanist legacy reinforces Ingersoll and the freethought movement's influence on the American Midwest throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries.

Philosopher Carlin Romano once wrote that America is not an intellectual backwater, but rather a "place where the battle between dogma and doggedness in seeking answers never ends, from sea to shining sea."⁴⁰ In this vein, Robert Green Ingersoll challenged the theological and intellectual status quo of the late nineteenth century, and as such, reaffirmed his place in history as an engaged, synthesizing, challenging public intellectual. From his battles with Dwight Moody, John P.D. John, and the "Indianapolis Clergy" to his connections with midwestern freethinkers like German-Americans Clemens Vonnegut, Philip Rappaport, and Hermann Lieber, Ingersoll

⁴⁰ Carlin Romano, *America the Philosophical* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 23.

embraced his friends and emboldened his foes with tact, rigor, and intellectual honesty. In using his role as a public intellectual, he uncovered the multitudinous facets of belief and unbelief in this region during the end of the nineteenth century. He exemplified that balance of “dogma” and “doggedness” that Romano identifies as the key trait of the American intellectual tradition.

However, in a larger sense, Ingersoll’s connections to the central Midwest and his role as a public intellectual personified something foundational, something that traces its roots back to the nation’s founding: what does it mean to be an American? As a partial answer to this age-old question, Ingersoll’s life in the public arena is quintessentially American. Born in the backwoods of New York to an abolitionist clergyman father, Ingersoll was a self-made man who taught himself the law, fought in the Civil War, campaigned on behalf of an emerging Republican party, and became one of the foremost religious iconoclasts and public intellectuals of his age. People sparred with him not because they thought it would be easy, but because they knew it would challenge them to be better thinkers and orators in their own right. Never content with how things were, Ingersoll challenged his allies and enemies to envision a better world, one where *freedom* was the highest absolute. Among the fragmentary notes he wrote throughout his life, Ingersoll stated that, “Intellectual freedom is only the right to be honest.”⁴¹ Robert Ingersoll’s experiences in the central Midwest showed his ability to be honest to his own ideals while illustrating and advancing the American religious intellectual narrative forward. This may be his most important legacy.

⁴¹ Robert Ingersoll, “Fragments,” *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Volume 12—*Tributes and Miscellany*, ed. C. P. Farrell (New York: Ingersoll League, 1929), 358.

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Freethought and Religion in the Central Midwest”

Indiana University at Kokomo
B.S. History/Political Science, with Minor in Philosophy 2014
Area of Concentration: 19th and Early 20th Century American
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AWARDS

Brian Bolton Graduate/Older Student Scholarship, \$1,100, FFRF, Inc. – Essay
submission to FFRF’s newspaper, *Freethought Today* September 2014

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Indiana University Kokomo
Editor-In-Chief, *The Correspondent* August 2013-May 2014

Indiana University Kokomo
Treasurer, History/Political Science Club August 2013-May 2014

Indiana University Kokomo
**Student Tutor for the Chancellor’s Scholar
in International Relations** August-December 2014

Howard County Historical Society and Museum
Intern and Exhibits Volunteer May 2013-July 2014

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
Vice President, Graduate Student History Association August 2015-May 2016

Indiana Capitol Tour Office
Intern August 2014-July 2015

Indiana Historical Bureau
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PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

February 2016: Indiana Association of Historians Annual Conference, Bloomington,
IN; “The Freethinkers Society of Indianapolis”

August 2016: Center for Inquiry Indiana, Indianapolis, IN; “Ingersoll, Infidels, and Indianapolis: Freethought and Religion in the Central Midwest”

PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

February 2017: Indiana Association of Historians Annual Conference, Lafayette, IN; “Robert Ingersoll & Lew Wallace’s Legendary Train Ride: Freethought and Religion in Gilded Age Indiana.”

April 2017: National Council on Public History Annual Conference, Indianapolis, IN; “Leveraging the Present: Between Memory, Heritage, and History;” Joint Presentation with Jennifer Joyce, Daniel Maher, and Cyra Walker

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

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