

# STUDIES IN MIDWESTERN HISTORY

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## THE PERILS AND PROMISE OF MIDWESTERN STUDIES

By Frederick E. Witzig<sup>1</sup>

As I reflect on the eight-year history of Midwest Studies (renamed the Midwest Initiative, then Midwest Matters; here I will use the term MSI, for Midwest Studies Initiative) at Monmouth College in west-central Illinois, two relevant news pieces from the community of small, private, liberal arts colleges circulate around me. The first, that of Iowa Wesleyan College throwing overboard faculty, staff, and academic programs in an effort to stay afloat, is actually more than a year old, but it was refreshed on our campus by a recent IWC visitor who explained its painful repercussions. The second, the startling announcement of the closure of Sweet Briar College in Virginia, was referenced during a faculty meeting discussion of new strategies for student recruitment and has reverberated since then in hallway conversations around campus. Our Director of Admissions pointed out, rather ominously, that the business of attracting and keeping students has changed dramatically in the past four years, and colleges must be nimble and acutely aware of trends among young college seekers and their parents. Colleges like ours have never had it easy,

<sup>1</sup> Fredrick E. Witzig is an Associate Professor of History at Monmouth College and Coordinating Advisor to the *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research*. He was one of the Coordinating Advisors to the Midwest Studies Initiative before withdrawing, at least for a time, to focus on the journal and another research project. He thanks Jane Jakoubek, Robin Johnson, and Simon Cordery for assistance with this article.

but the pace of school closings, sales, and mergers has quickened since the economic downturn of 2008, fostering an “all hands on deck” mentality among survivors.<sup>2</sup>

The Midwest Studies Initiative was born in just such an atmosphere of alarm and innovation. It survives today, but enthusiasm for its usefulness to our scholarship and to the identity of Monmouth College is waning. Its two purposes—generating excitement for the College among prospective students and donors and stimulating innovative, interdisciplinary studies of the Midwest that could contribute to the welfare of the region—were intertwined from the start. But, also from the start, the College has had difficulty keeping them from working at cross-purposes. Put another way, the tension between marketing and academic integrity has become a burden, and to rid itself of that burden, Monmouth College appears poised to jettison the Midwest Studies Initiative altogether. What follows here is a short history of Midwest Studies and a defense of the scholarly utility of the initiative.

The roots of MSI go back to a campus retreat brainstorming session in 2006. A team of faculty and staff made up of an Admissions representative and professors from the Biology, Sociology, Music, and Communication Studies departments came up with the idea of a Center for the Study of the Midwest. Records are sketchy regarding the purposes and form envisioned by the team (the team lacked a historian, after all!), but the idea was soon forgotten anyway. Then came the 2008 economic meltdown. Remarkably, Monmouth College fought the panic and refused major cutbacks. I was on the job market that year, and two of the five colleges to which I applied abruptly ended their searches due to financial uncertainty. Fortunately for me, Monmouth did not, and in the fall of 2009 I began my time here. Instead of pulling back, our trustees and administration chose to try to seize the moment by publicizing optimism and growth in a bid to assure prospective students of our stability and momentum while other institutions were in retreat. We would do this by releasing a flurry of newsworthy enterprises designed to draw attention to the value of a Monmouth College liberal arts education.

Soon after I arrived on campus, our President announced a new initiative called Midwest Studies. A native Hoosier and graduate of Wabash College in Indiana, Mauri Ditzler’s roots in the Midwest go deep. After a brief stint earning his Ph.D. in chemistry at Duke University in North Carolina, and fifteen years as a chemistry professor at College of the Holy Cross in

<sup>2</sup> Michael McDonald, “Small U.S. Colleges Battle Death Spiral as Enrollment Drops,” *Bloomberg Business*, April 14, 2014; Scott Carlson, “Sweet Briar’s Demise is a Cautionary Tale for Other Colleges,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 5, 2015.

Massachusetts, Ditzler returned to his native region as Dean at Milliken University in Illinois in 1994 and at his alma mater in 1999 before becoming President of Monmouth in 2005. All the while he retained a farm, orchard, and partial interest in a corn de-tasseling company in Indiana. Thus, this initiative arose more from his own commitments to the Midwest than it did from any lingering enthusiasm for the Center idea, of which there was none. Ditzler's penchant for telling stories about his experiences in the Midwest not only made for entertaining—and long-winded, I note affectionately—faculty meetings, they also revealed that the Midwest had nurtured his soul, and he had little doubt that such an education could work similar magic for other young people. The idea, it seems to me, was that we should give up on trying to compete with eastern colleges on their own terms and promote Midwestern cultural distinctiveness as the proper grounds for a liberal arts education. Let us embrace our heritage and our location in the middle of rural west-central Illinois with pride, highlighting the values around and within us that set us apart and make us attractive to prospective students.



*President Mauri Ditzler speaking at the dedication of the Center for Science and Business in May, 2013*

Since I taught the “History of Illinois and the Midwest” course, and since I possessed the virtues of a new employee on campus (meaning, I lacked the burden of grudges and favors to worry about), I was asked to head up the new Midwest Studies program. Ironically, I was born in Los Angeles and spent the first several decades of my life there. My colleague in the History Department, Simon Cordery, a native of England, agreed to help me, and we became co-coordinators. The assignment of a Midwest Studies program to a native Californian and Brit was less awkward than it sounds. I had strong family ties to Illinois and Ohio, I went to graduate school in Bloomington, Indiana, and I had taught Midwestern history in that state for a couple of years. Cordery, who had lived in the Chicago suburbs and graduated from Northern Illinois University, was finishing a book on oft-time Illinoisan Mother Jones and preparing another on railroads in the Midwest.

Our first task, as we saw it, was to figure out what we were trying to do. We did not want MSI to devolve into naval-gazing or boosterism. We wanted the program to be academically rigorous and meaningful, honest and productive, reflective but forward-looking. And to succeed, it needed support across campus. Both of us are historians, but working at Monmouth College, which prides itself on its “Integrated Studies” (the core of our general education program actually bears that title), we believed we could secure sufficient institutional support if all departments could contribute to the initiative. We wrote the following mission statement that, we thought, reflected those concerns. It laid out our goals, identified existing Midwest-themed components of our curriculum, and suggested some future paths forward:

Midwest Studies focuses scholarly attention on the history, character, and future of the Midwest. We seek to understand, with neither regret nor triumphalism, the challenges and opportunities facing our region in this age of globalization. Midwest Studies at Monmouth College is premised on the belief that the College can and should contribute to the Midwest for the mutual benefit of the region and of our students. At the core of Midwest Studies are courses that encourage students to understand the region using the distinctive Monmouth College attention to interdisciplinarity, active student engagement with surrounding communities, and the liberal arts. Current courses investigate connections between science and business in the Midwest; demographic, economic, and political realities spawned by global migration; historical memory and regional identity; and how modes of transportation and communications have defined, and continue to define, the Midwest. Potential initiatives include a Midwest Studies academic minor, an annual interdisciplinary undergraduate research conference, a journal for the exchange of ideas, and a Midwest Studies Institute. Students who graduate with Midwest Studies experiences will be prepared for careers and civic engagement in the Midwest without losing sight of the national and global context.

To make this happen, we formed an “MSI Steering Committee” with faculty from Political Science, Art, Modern Foreign Languages, and Religious Studies. Buy-in across campus made our prospects for a lively program appear promising. An email list of people interested in MSI included members of twelve academic departments and four staff members. A call for course proposals issued by the Dean resulted in four new courses with Midwestern emphases, including a course on Midwestern ecology taught by a biologist, a course on Midwest documentary production in the Communications Studies department, a literature course on Midwest authors, and a course on politics in the Midwest. A local farmer and logger donated an impressive collection of Native American artifacts that became the foundation of our unique archeology lab and course offerings. Our public relations folks put together an attractive website, and the Midwestern Governors Association offered to work with us to establish permanent internship arrangements for Monmouth College students. Our trustees agreed to fund the establishment of the *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research*, currently in its fifth year, which publishes fine research articles written by undergraduate students, most of whom do their work at Midwestern colleges. A “Midwest Scholars” scholarship competition has proven remarkably successful in garnering attention among high-performing high school students.

Meanwhile, the initiative stirred up the flurry of news articles hoped for by our president. The Midwest Matters yearly symposium attracts public figures from around the Midwest each fall, generating positive news coverage for the school. Cordery and I did short interviews for regional media. Richard Longworth, author of the well-received *Caught in the Middle: America's Heartland in the Age of Globalism*<sup>3</sup> and blogger at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs' Global Midwest Initiative website, praised Monmouth College for its progressive embrace of its Midwestern heritage. He mentions Monmouth on his blog periodically and has praised Ditzler for resisting the impulse among Midwestern colleges to “shun the communities around them and to present themselves as not really Midwestern, but as scholarly outposts in flyover territory.” He praised MSI by noting how it took a small college to lead the way for bigger institutions: “This program, both

<sup>3</sup> Richard Longworth, *Caught in the Middle: America's Heartland in the Age of Globalism* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2008).

brave and obvious, should shame other Midwestern colleges and universities, big and small, to do the same.”<sup>4</sup>

And so, within just a couple of years, MSI appeared destined to become a leading academic voice for the interdisciplinary study of the Midwest and a boon to Monmouth’s struggle to thrive in an adverse higher education climate. But in that statement lay its main hurdle: what exactly is the Midwest Studies Initiative? MSI suffered from an identity crisis. Was it a serious academic endeavor, devoted to the revival of the Midwest as a distinct region for study, similar to Western Studies or Southern Studies? Was it a scholarly attempt to address political, economic, ecological, social, and cultural issues that plague the region, a liberal arts version of the Wisconsin Idea in Madison? Or was it an advertising coup for Enrollment Management at the College, a hook with which to land ever larger freshmen classes, or a lure for Institutional Development to attract donors sympathetic to the plight of their motherland? Plenty rested on how we answered those questions. Faculty buy-in depended on perceptions of who drove MSI: administration or the faculty. If administrators were in charge, and higher enrollments were the goal, did that mean faculty needed to respond to potential student demand for a Midwest-based curriculum? What about other, pre-existing scholarly interests on campus? Would they need to bend to the needs of this new endeavor? Finally, much of the publicity occurred before we had much of a program, including enough Midwest-themed classes, properly vetted by faculty oversight committees, to constitute a major, minor, or concentration. The need for positive publicity for the initiative was real, but so was the need for time to give the program substance so that we were not publicizing mere enthusiasm.

Every institution has its politics, and this is not the place to sort through ours. I wish instead to point out what should be of more interest to readers of this essay. If MSI suffered from an identity crisis, it also suffered from a “self-esteem problem” that other regions avoid. Faculty at Monmouth worried that Midwest Studies would make us parochial, a concern that scholars at institutions with “Southern Studies” and “New England Studies” do not seem to nourish. The unspoken assumption was that the Midwest is unworthy of study, too culturally backwards and economically past its prime to teach us anything today. As a former colleague put it, “other regions have some key set of events that unite them historically, at least for a time. . . . The Midwest is largely defined as places that are not those other places.” In other words, we cannot study the Midwest because the

<sup>4</sup> Barry McNamara, “President Ditzler named on Midwest List,” Monmouth College, January 13, 2010; Richard Longworth, “Thinking About the Midwest,” *The Midwesterner: Blogging the Global Midwest* (website), November 19, 2009.

Midwest has not done and does not do anything important enough, or distinct enough from other regions, to merit scholarly attention. If that is true, then a Midwest Studies program could only be a marketing gimmick, a feel-good campaign to convince prospective students they should study with us because we smile bigger and say thank you more often than people on the coast. (And would that even work: could we really make “Come Here, We’re Midwestern Nice” into a successful marketing campaign?). This is what we might call the “problem of the parochial,” and it is a real problem, even if it exists only in the minds of skeptics.

Of course, the Midwest does merit scholarly attention, the Midwest is not merely “that place that isn’t other places,” and there are certainly key sets of events that unite the Midwest historically, as the readers of this article no doubt already understand. The region made major contributions to the development of western democracy, the end of slavery, the American Presidency, American industrial and economic ascendancy, and the amelioration of world hunger, among many examples. Far from idyllic, the region also saw the murder of Elijah Lovejoy, the Haymarket Riot, the Pullman Strikes, race riots, Kent State, and Wounded Knee. Battles? In telling the history of Native Americans and westward expansion, why would we slight the campaigns of George Rogers Clark, or Fallen Timbers, or the War of 1812, which was largely fought here, or many of the nineteenth-century Indian Wars? Midwestern states gave rise to William Henry Harrison, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, William McKinley, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Barack Obama, presidents of key importance to the development of the United States domestically and internationally. And they also gave rise to Richard Warren Sears, Mother Jones, Eugene V. Debs, Father Coughlin, John Deere, Ray Kroc, Gloria Steinem, and Phyllis Schlafly. African-Americans fleeing segregation and violence in the South made their way during the Great Migration to Midwestern cities and towns large and small. Mormonism was born in New York and is now a major world religion based in Utah, but its formative experiences played out first in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, a state that still hosts the Mormon mecca of Nauvoo. Other religious minorities, such as Anabaptist communities and communitarians, found peace in the woods and prairies of the old Northwest. Should I note that Jim Jones was from Indianapolis?

The point is, while the Midwest hosted little of the American Revolution or the Civil War, and has never been known for high-brow cultural sophistication, it has been the place where countless millions of Americans have worked out the terms of their daily existence. Here they did the hard labor of agriculture and industry, not with complacency but with innovation and optimism. Here

they formed and reformed family and developed religious experiments. Is the history of the average American, of all colors and ethnicities, not important enough to understand? Is history only interesting and useful if we tell it, to borrow from the old adage about soldier life, as a story of general monotony punctuated by moments of terror? If the Midwest does represent the heart and soul of America, as we often say, if it is the homeland of the “average American,” then does that not make it all the more important to study? If the South merits its own category of analysis because of slavery, and New England because of its early industrial, political, and “high” cultural dominance, then should we not tell the story of why the Midwest chose another path? And if the Midwest interacted with, even depended upon, the rest of the world, much as did the South and the East, then why does the charge of “parochialism” apply only to study of the Midwest and not to other regions?

I am preaching to the choir, and many of my readers have no doubt written their own sermons against what Jon Lauck calls the “cultural imperialism of the East and of Europe.”<sup>5</sup> I included my own screed because of its importance to MSI, which is twofold. First, multidisciplinary studies of the Midwest hold great promise for meeting today’s challenges to the region, the nation, and the world. History reveals that the region’s economy, its racial and ethnic tensions, its political traditions, and its religious vitality made this region both distinct and typically American. Today, as its factories fall into disuse; as the world’s disadvantaged continue to migrate into the region for jobs (Monmouth, with its large livestock-slaughtering and packing plant, is now home to surprisingly large communities of West Africans, Burmese, and Latinos); as all eyes turn to Iowa for clues to the 2016 election; and as Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan (a city with the densest population of Muslims in America), Plainfield, Indiana (home of one of the most important American Muslim organizations, the Islamic Center of North America), Cedar Rapids (home of the first mosque in America), and other Midwest cities take the lead in working out what it means to be Islamic and American, the need for all scholarly disciplines to analyze the Midwest from multiple angles is all the more important. If MSI is to avoid being an advertising gimmick playing off students’ (and their parents’) nostalgic sentimentality for their region, then it must take on the daily problems and opportunities of labor, politics, religion, leisure, and culture that occupied the

<sup>5</sup> Jon Lauck, *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2013), 3.

millions of Midwesterners in the past. The problem of the parochial needs to be exposed as a myth for the good of people within and without the region.

The second reason why reminders of the utility of the Midwest as a region of scholarly study is important to MSI is because it is in danger of succumbing to what we might call the “lure of the national.” The enthusiasm for embracing Monmouth College’s Midwest heritage and promoting MSI for any purpose, academic or marketing, is on the wane. For decades we have drawn our student body from Illinois schools, but the size of Illinois’ graduating high school classes has been dwindling and shows no signs of reversing. The wisdom of recruiting nationally and internationally is becoming apparent to most people. To reach those students, our new President, born, raised, and educated in Kentucky, where he worked for many years before coming to us this past July, is seeking to recast us as a national college. The term “Midwest” is slipping from our marketing materials. The move toward national recognition, where the money supposedly waits, is effectively killing off the danger of MSI as a mere marketing gimmick, but whether or not MSI can survive as a dynamic, attractive, and useful scholarly enterprise is in question.

I am not disputing the wisdom of going national, but I do not see the Midwest and the national as mutually exclusive. There are ways to blow both trumpets. I propose an example from our own field of history that illustrates how attending to the regional helps explain the national. This semester I am teaching a research methods course on “Religion in America.” One of my students stumbled into the story of John Clark Ridpath (1840-1900), a historian nationally known in his era who probably deserves a place in the pantheon of American historiography alongside Frederick Jackson Turner, Henry Adams, and Charles and Mary Beard. Instead, historians of historiography have nearly forgotten him. I am aware of exactly one scholarly article, one book chapter, and one graduate thesis dealing with Ridpath from at least the last four decades. Unsurprisingly, the article comes from the *Indiana Magazine of History*, the thesis from the University of Illinois, and the book chapter from a Midwesterner.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Chris Smith, “A Plea for a New Appreciation of Popular History: John Clark Ridpath, a Case Study,” *Indiana Magazine of History* vol. 77, no. 3 (September 1981), 205-230; Louis Christian Smith, “John Clark Ridpath—U.S. Popular Historian: A Social and Intellectual Biography and an Examination of a Genre of Literature” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, 1972); Gregory M. Pfitzer, “The Metahistorian as Popularizer: John Clark Ridpath and the Universal Laws of Popular History,” in *Popular History and the Literary Marketplace, 1840-1920* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 123-178. In Pfitzer’s online bio, accessed at [www.skidmore.edu/american\\_studies/faculty/pfitzher.php](http://www.skidmore.edu/american_studies/faculty/pfitzher.php), he notes that he “grew up in various midwestern towns” in Ohio. Special thanks to Paul Putz for drawing my attention to the Pfitzer chapter.



talents,” attendees presented Ridpath “an autograph souvenir containing sentiments and expressions of good will from 200 authors of the United States.”<sup>7</sup> Ridpath apparently sold over two million books to people in large cities and small towns in America. Chris Smith, one of the few historians to take notice of Ridpath, suggests Ridpath’s “name was a household word: mail merely addressed to ‘Ridpath, the Historian’ reached him.”<sup>8</sup>

Remnants of his popularity are legion in the primary sources of his era. The *Weekly Transcript* in Little Falls, Minnesota published short historical pieces written by Ridpath.<sup>9</sup> Newspapers in Lincoln, Nebraska, Paris, Kentucky, New York City, Washington D.C., Johnson City, Tennessee, Caldwell, Idaho, Spokane, Washington, and San Francisco, among many others, carried advertisements for his books. On January 16, 1898, the *Norfolk Virginian* published a “Grand Surprise! For Every Reader of The Virginian”: a special sale of one hundred sets of the *Standard American Encyclopedia*, “the joint product of America’s most eminent scholars and experts—personally edited by John Clark Ridpath—assisted by more than 300 editors and 100 writers on special subjects—including such eminent men as Thomas A. Edison, inventor of the Telephone etc.—Daniel Cady Eaton, Ph.D—Prof. of Botany in Yale College,” and others. Notice that Ridpath did not need an introduction like the others. A full-page spread for “Ridpath’s History of the World” in the *Omaha Daily Bee* on October 26, 1913, credited Ridpath’s “wonderfully beautiful style, a style no historian has ever equaled,” and quoted the *Boston Post’s* claim that “his historical works are accepted as standards in schools, colleges and homes.”

Importantly, Ridpath wrote during an era crucial to the development of American science, religion, and foreign affairs. By the 1890s, American theologians still had not figured out what to make of Darwinism, a theory from across the Atlantic that confounded even some American scientists. Anti-Darwinian fundamentalism, at least as an American cultural phenomenon, was still in its infancy, and the Scopes trial was more than two decades away. But Americans of all walks of life and religious commitments read about Darwinian natural selection from Ridpath, who began his *History of the World: Mankind* with a section on human evolution. “It is in the very nature of man,” he wrote, “to inquire diligently and persistently into the time, the place, and the circumstances of his own origin.”<sup>10</sup> For answers, Ridpath turned to astronomy, geology,

<sup>7</sup> May 17, 1891. Accessed via <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, “A Plea for a New Appreciation of Popular History,” 201.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance, June 7, 1895.

<sup>10</sup> John Clark Ridpath, *History of the World: Mankind I* (New York, Merrill and Baker, 1897), 38.

archeology, paleontology, ethnology, and what he called “tradition” for answers. David Christian’s *Maps of Time*,<sup>11</sup> the seminal book of the new “Big History” subfield, has nothing on Ridpath’s scope and interdisciplinarity and likely has enjoyed much less of a readership. Ridpath believed that both the Bible and science could teach us something about our origins, so he included sections on the location of the Garden of Eden and on biological evidence for the evolutionary descent of humankind. Unfortunately, readers would also get a mild form of scientific racism popular at the time. Or, should we say, they picked up from Ridpath elements of the scientific racism that in turn became popular at the time.

In similar fashion, Ridpath served as an interpreter of eastern religion and culture at a time when America was just dipping its toes in the waters of imperialism. When Ridpath first published his *History of the World* in 1894, the United States government was busy formalizing its annexation of Hawaii and, though he obviously could not have known it then, was a few years away from taking the Philippines and other South Pacific colonies. If Hawaii seemed too distant to most Americans, and European adventures in Africa too exotic, the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair brought people and artifacts from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to American (and Midwestern) soil to be gawked at, tasted, and photographed. But for those who could not make it to Chicago, Ridpath told them all about those foreign peoples in sections titled “Polynesian Mongoloids” (which included subsections devoted to “Hawaiians and Samoans”) and “African Nigritians.” Much research needs to be done on Ridpath and his presentation of the world’s peoples and cultures to an American audience, but one quote is sufficient to demonstrate how rich his materials could be for scholars of imperialism, religion, and race and ethnicity. After noting that “contact with Europeans . . . proved to be what is virtually the death of the [Hawaiian] race,” and praising missionaries for their work towards “moral improvement” of foreign peoples, Ridpath took Europeans and Americans to task for less laudable endeavors: “Until the Christian states can control their own emissaries and keep back the importation of vice and crime, the cargoes of alcohol and opium, and the dreadful infection of criminal diseases, it were far better that the innocent, though barbarous, outlying races of mankind should be left to themselves . . .”<sup>12</sup> One might doubt how many of Ridpath’s customers actually bothered to read his multi-volume works, but one can also easily imagine people throughout the United States leafing through his tomes for

<sup>11</sup> David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Ridpath, *History of the World* IV, 400-401.

background information to what they were reading in their daily newspapers about American involvement in Hawaii, the Philippines, and Cuba.

I am fascinated that a former professor at DePauw in the rural Midwest, not at Harvard or Yale or Columbia on the east coast, attained such intercultural authority among Americans of all regions. I am also intrigued by questions about how the Midwest nurtured Ridpath's worldly vision. Did his efforts take on a Midwest flavor distinct from those of easterners? Did he see himself as in any way different, for good or for bad, than theologians, philosophers, and historians in Boston? How much did he reflect a Midwest understanding of the world, and how much did he contribute to its formation? Can we discover how much influence Ridpath had over the way Americans across the continent received Darwinism and the new immigrant populations, and how they responded to imperialist impulses at the turn of the century? The latter questions are of immense importance to the history of the nation and the world in the twentieth century, and the former questions to the acceptance of the Midwest as a category of analysis.

There are, no doubt, many stories like Ridpath's waiting to be told, and much to be learned from the study of Midwestern agriculture, ecology, immigration, political habits, artwork, and cultural tendencies. Cross-disciplinary work with application regionally, nationally, and internationally very well might flourish in the Midwest if Midwestern scholars embraced their place and thought more deliberately about what the region has to offer. In 2013, Monmouth College opened the doors of a new Center for Science and Business, the largest building on campus. Our natural sciences and our Political Economy and Commerce department were deliberately positioned next to each other in the belief that greater communication could lead to greater collaboration. What might our biologist learn about the Mississippi River that could be made financially viable for the benefit of the world's clean water supply? One of our political scientists, Robin Johnson, also in the building, who studies the interplay of politics and economics in small Midwest towns, has much to say about the effects of state and national policy-making on "average" Americans. Under the auspices of MSI, he has conducted thought-provoking public opinion polls of voters in the Midwest. The fruitfulness of these sorts of studies in terms of both scholarship and practical application is exciting, and I can think of no reason why potential students from across the United States would think of them as parochial concerns.

Because of its identity crisis, MSI, now Midwest Matters, is treading water at Monmouth College. The *Journal* is thriving, but it is slipping away from its Midwest identity. The annual

symposium continues, as do a few of the original classes. Johnson, who as the sole Coordinator of Midwest Matters is working heroically to keep the initiative alive, organizes the annual public opinion polls and symposia dealing with the political attitudes of Midwesterners. Funding and administrative support has become tenuous, and the initiative is no longer a topic of discussion on campus. I believe that if the Midwest Studies Initiative loses its Midwest, its studies, or its initiative, the College will lose an important opportunity to contribute to the revival of the region and, since the Midwest has always been fundamental to national affairs, to the nation as a whole. In many ways, as goes the Midwest, so goes the nation. I think that makes for a story compelling for both academics and marketing.