

Kansas speaker held IU students' ears in 1912

William Allen White came to Bloomington to speak on Feb. 16, 1912. Today students of the history of journalism know where the man where he was in the mosaic of that profession's giants.

By the time White arrived in Bloomington to speak he had already dropped out of the University of Kansas to edit the *El Dorado Republican*, written editorials for the *Kansas City Star* and purchased his hometown newspaper, the *Emporia Gazette* in Kansas

On the Indiana (University) platform White was introduced by Paul McNutt, a student who later became dean of the IU Law School, governor of Indiana and governor general of the Philippines. The Kansan apologized for reading his speech, rather than delivering it extemporaneously. The audience didn't mind in the least.

But it was to the students that White directed his remarks. His speech was reported in the Bloomington *Evening World* of Feb. 17, 1912. At the beginning of the speech he said with a twinkle in his eye, "I shall pay no attention to the older people here because I regard them as merely hangers-on and will treat



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

them accordingly."

After recalling his college years, the Kansan told the students "Life is a succession of views ... We see life more clearly as we know men better ... In all men there is good and I doubt not but that in but that in all men there is a little bad."

White asked the students to remember the histories of some important figures of the past. He suggested that they may have been considered demagogues of their time. Two of his examples were Daniel Boone and John D. Rockefeller.

"Daniel Boone worked his way into the wilderness and made it possible for us to be here ... John D. Rockefeller did all in his power to keep down the disorganizing influences in the oil industry ... Today it would not do for Daniel Boone to act the same way in Kentucky

as he formerly did. His means and methods would be considered irregular and might bring unfortunate results ... John D. Rockefeller is now viewed in alarm and is harassed by law suits."

White predicted, "Who can say that great men make eras or that eras make great men? Now we are in the era of Radicalism. When it is finished we will have completely changed our ideals ... It will probably bring about more equitable distribution of the rewards of labor."

He reminded the students that there are wrongs in our society that need to be righted — children robbed of their childhood and laborers underpaid, for example. "During the lifetime of our fathers, men had opportunities to give their lives to make men free. We men of today do not have any such opportunities, but it is within our power to make the world better."

White continued, "Through the efforts of the demagogues we have secured employers' liability acts, child labor laws and many other helpful provisions. The call to serve is strong and sure. The radicals of today are respected. Yesterday they were hooted and hissed."

White confessed that during his youth he "went out like a young jackass and made speeches in school houses denouncing their (Populists') crazy ideas. The people did not mind me. The Populists advocated postal savings banks, income tax, federal control of railroads and of corporations engaging in interstate commerce and federal adjustment of rates."

The Encyclopedia Britannica says that White's writings, particularly a volume of sketches, *In Our Town*, "gave him wide reputation as an interpreter of life in the country towns of the Middle-West." He also had another life as a novelist, short story writer and biographer.

After his Bloomington appearance White gained further national attention as a Red Cross observer in France in 1917, a delegate to the Russian conference at Prinkipo in 1917 and as a member (appointed by President Herbert Hoover) of a commission sent to Haiti to come up with ways to terminate U.S. occupation of that country.

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