



Joan Mickelson. *Joseph W. Young, Jr., and the City Beautiful: A Biography of the Founder of Hollywood, Florida*. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2012. 219 pp. \$49.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-9247-3.

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Published on H-Environment (October, 2013)

Commissioned by David T. Benac

One Man Can Build a City, But Not a Book

“In the United States of America,” Joan Mickelson writes, “it is possible for one person to initiate the building of an entire city” (p. 1). She demonstrates exactly that through her latest work, *Joseph W. Young, Jr., and the City Beautiful*, chronicling the life of Hollywood, Florida, founder J. W. Young. Local historians have written about the city since its creation in 1920 but only Mickelson provides a comprehensive biography of Young himself. This distinguishes her text but also leaves room for error; Mickelson so insists on Young’s significance that she fails to adequately contextualize the man and his times.

The year 1882 sets much of Mickelson’s narrative in motion. Though a matter of some debate, Young was probably born then somewhere in Washington Territory (“this would make him a pioneer since birth,” Mickelson observes [p. 6]). That year also saw the first home built in what would soon become a rapidly developing Long Beach, California, where at the turn of the century Young married and began dealing in real estate. Additionally the Old Dominion Copper Mine was opened in Globe, Arizona, where Young moved in 1914 after severe floods devastated his California holdings. At the same time, the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company began dredging the Atlantic Intercoastal Waterway to open south Florida for development. Mickelson only briefly comments on the coincidence but it is a useful device for illustrating Young’s exceedingly varied and opportunistic career. After setting up shop in Globe, for example, Young fretted over wartime labor unrest and, apparently foreseeing a mobile postwar America, relo-

cated to the original Motor City of Indianapolis.

Young capitalized on his mounting successes and in 1920 began building his own Florida resort city, emulating business partner and Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher. Throughout the book, Mickelson describes how Young’s travels influenced Hollywood construction and promotion but speculates that the name was essentially original. Hollywood grew from within the city beautiful movement, deliberately blending aesthetics and utility, eventually rivaling Henry Flagler’s designs for St. Augustine. In 1926, a hurricane decimated the city just as the Florida land bubble burst, prompting Young to develop existing assets in the Adirondacks. Still thriving even in the Great Depression, Young planned an ambitious return to his dream city but succumbed to what was likely a heart attack in 1934.

If Young’s story is relatively straightforward, Mickelson’s narrative is not. Some phrasing is a bit unwieldy and readers may need to repeat sections with excessive comma splices. Fortunately each of her twenty chapters begins with a concise summary of its contents. As for the substance of the work, Mickelson relies on a variety of evidence, including numerous local histories, newspapers, and testimonials. Readers should, however, remain skeptical of material published by Young’s companies or interviews with those banking on his profits.

What will researchers learn from this work? Environmental historians may be interested in each climate’s disastrous consequences for Young, or his efforts

to manage nature through dredging and drainage, but here this remains essentially unexplored. Those looking to better understand post-Gilded Age society will also be disappointed. This is thoroughly a Great Man work, without substantial consideration of gender, race, labor, or most any broader social history. Mickelson frequently mentions architecture, but did gendered space factor into Young's resorts at the height of first-wave feminism? Young is apparently distinguished for constructing a "miniature Hollywood" outside the city limits for black laborers, but what does this mean for a latter-day carpetbagger in the segregated South? Young needs to demonstrably represent his era to be historically relevant. As it stands, he is a timeless, tenacious visionary; consequential events and movements happening around

Young appear almost tangential.

Mickelson has put much into synthesizing a biography of Young, which may prove valuable as a reference for those interested in pre-WWII Florida urban planning. Still the book lacks clear direction. Occasionally the author lapses into confused presentism (once opining that "the mortgage crisis of 2007 ... suggests in hindsight" that inflating real estate value was a bad idea in 1925 [p. 122]), but the efforts are abortive. Mickelson concludes with recollections by Young's contemporaries. "Hollywood lost much in his death," one Wallace Stevens reflected, "but it gained all through his life" (p. 187). The question remains: does Young have anything else to offer?

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Citation: Kyle Bridge. Review of Mickelson, Joan, *Joseph W. Young, Jr., and the City Beautiful: A Biography of the Founder of Hollywood, Florida*. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. October, 2013.

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