

*Right to be Idle* is therefore not just a powerful work of historical research; it is also a tract for our times.

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**The Age of Charisma: Leaders, Followers, and Emotions in American Society, 1870–1940**, by Jeremy C. Young, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017, Pp. 356, \$49.99 (hbk), \$40.00 (e-book), ISBN 9781107114623, ISBN 9781316944370

In *The Age of Charisma: Leaders, Followers, and Emotions in American Society, 1870–1940*, Jeremy C. Young tells the story of how a certain style of leadership came to dominate American political and popular culture. Young dubs this leadership style “charismatic,” and he argues that it came to prominence between the 1890s and 1920s, a time when Americans longed for stability. Charismatic leaders acted as conduits for their followers’ emotions and in turn encouraged their followers to change society by changing themselves. Far from irrational, Young shows, followers often joined charismatic movements after lengthy deliberation. Far from ineffectual, these charismatic movements had massive repercussions on American society in their own time, with ripple effects into ours. Young takes his readers on a tour of vignettes of individual charismatic leaders, their education, and their philosophies of speaking and leading, including Billy Sunday, Marcus Garvey, Eugene Debs, Theodore Roosevelt, Patrick Gilmore, and John Philip Sousa.

In this book, Young artfully and usefully reconstructs the rhetorical and social tradition within which figures of charismatic leadership self-consciously engaged. Such figures all saw themselves and were seen by their followers as possessing “personal magnetism,” which they understood as “the ability to appeal to others and to affect their behavior, by means of non-rational sub-verbal cues” (p. 2).

Before the beginning of the “Age of Charisma” in the 1890s, Americans feared charismatic speakers, especially men, as sexual deviants and people stealing others’ individuality and autonomy. But, during the late nineteenth-century, a “personal magnetism craze” swept the nation, from religion to politics to popular culture, as hundreds of people made their livelihoods on Chautauqua and other lecture circuits as public leaders (p. 3). Many magnetic leaders believed that anyone could cultivate charisma through the right training, a conviction that produced many studies on the elocutionary theory of people such as Benjamin Rush. Rush, an Enlightenment thinker, founding father, and reformer, promoted, among others, a “uniquely emotional speaking style” (p. 43). And a fascination with “hero-worship” and “powerful, even authoritarian” leadership came to define the late nineteenth-century personal magnetism craze in which leaders sought to build “intense, durable and directed bonds with their followers,” who, in turn, built institutions to bring the good news to the masses (pp. 42–3). As self-cultivated leaders and heroes, Young writes, “magnetic leaders provided the blueprints for societal change; their converts hoped to put those plans into action” (p. 99).

But like all things, the golden age of public rhetors on lecture circuits came to an end, as the lecture circuits that had sustained them dwindled in size and many shut down. Young suggests that the popularization of radio killed the appeal and the need for emotionally engaged, lively public speakers. Many charismatic public speakers, used to live audiences and a large stage,

found it much harder to maintain their style, project their gestures, and speak effectively into a static microphone. Because of the physical restraints of the microphone, a more reserved and less emotionally engaged ideal of charismatic speech came into vogue starting in the 1920s and continuing into the 1940s.

Although Young's work is otherwise brilliantly argued, original, and deeply relevant to a number of different disciplines, his decline narrative limits its potential impact. In *The Age of Charisma*, Young offers a compelling narrative of one part of the larger history of charismatic movements in American history. It is unclear whether Young intends to suggest that there was only one "Age of Charisma," because throughout the work Young describes the phenomenon he is studying as both a state of being ("charisma" as an adjective) and as a distinct entity ("charisma" as a proper noun). There were, after all, many influential charismatic speakers before and after Young's charismatic era of the 1880s to the 1920s in the United States, such as abolitionists (before the Civil War) and birth control advocates (speaking charismatically during and after the "Age of Charisma"). Indeed, antebellum reformers of all stripes who spoke on lecture circuits, built cults of personality, and studied public speaking were also influenced by Benjamin Rush. Frederick Douglass, Lucy Stone, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among many others, were known for exceptionally emotionally engaging charismatic performances. Moreover, as Young notes, the subdued styles of radio personalities were "charismatic" in their own way to many listeners in the 1920s and 1930s (p. 222).

Young's work, read with attention to his applications of the word "charisma," has fascinating interdisciplinary implications, especially for historians of reform and religion. From the perspective of religious studies, Young's charismatic speakers may be understood as saints (some affiliated with religious denominations, others not), emanating metaphysical healing power. This has massive implications for the burgeoning literature on the blurred boundaries between the secular and the religious. As he has essentially reconstructed a shared religious and secular tradition of charisma and sainthood, Young's work offers fascinating grounds for comparisons of hero and saint worship, for example, contextualizing the recent literature comparing how Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln became remembered as almost superhuman figures emanating virtue. Moreover, his work will be of interest to historians of radical and reform movements in the nineteenth-century U.S., as it shows how both movements shared many of the same metaphors and built on many of the same traditions. Young's chapters on the development of the "charismatic tradition" and his discussions of the Second Great Awakening directly and usefully link antebellum with post-Civil War reform traditions. Certainly, in *The Age of Charisma*, Jeremy Young successfully shows that through charismatic public speaking, we can reform individuals, and, through them, society.

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**True Sex: The Lives of Trans Men at the Turn of the Twentieth Century**, by Emily Skidmore, New York: New York University Press, 2017, Pp. 272, \$27.00 (hbk), ISBN 9781479870639

Queer history has traditionally been written through an urban-centered epistemology, focusing on the lives and work of city dwellers and "cosmopolitan radicals" – a narrow lens that theorist