

Political profiles sadly lacking

COLEMAN YOUNG, William Milliken, Walter Reuther — three dynamic, powerful, influential men — each destined to play a role in Michigan's volatile political history. The good news is that books about each of these fascinating men have been published within the last few months.

The bad news is that, in all three books, we're showered with roses, roses, roses — with barely a prick of the thorn. The very nature of their life's work, the complexities of their personalities, the times that shaped their ideologies are all issues begging for objectivity.

In the Young biography ("Coleman Young and Detroit Politics — From Social Activist to Power Broker," by Wilbur C. Rich, Wayne State University Press, hardbound \$21.95), we see public "relations hard at work, and the results are predictable: a biography that is, ultimately, a boring piece of apologetics.

To have to concede that a book about Coleman Young is a yawner is pretty incredible, considering Young's own, carefully constructed tough-guy impression: the profane, irascible countenance, the seldom-appropriate, often-hilarious wit; the never-back-down stance, whether he's dealing with the military as a Tuskegee Airman during World War II, Harry Bennett and the Ford union busters in the 1940s, the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s, or fiscal decline, the dismantling of Polston, the abandonment by the Reagan administration and the sleaze factor in his own administration in the 1980s.

RICH, A PROFESSOR at Wayne State, may have been hobbled by the fact that this project grew out of a luncheon discussion with members of the Coleman Young Foundation.

The book was written over a four-year period with their unflinching support — though, according to notes at the end of the book, Rich was only able to interview Young on two occasions.

In "American Dreams: Lost and Found," Studs Terkel's 1980 chronicle of 100 American Lives, Young talks about his own life and brilliantly, idiomatically, profanely interjects it all in only 14 pages. Too bad he didn't allow Rich more time. Too bad he didn't write his own book.

"THE MILLIKEN YEARS, A Pictorial Reflection," is written by Joyce Braithwaite and George Weeks, published originally by The Traverse City Record-Eagle and Village Press, Inc., and released recently in large paperback by Wayne State University Press (\$17.50).

What you see is what you get: An endearing picture book with lots of hand shaking, lots of happy faces — about what you would expect from two former Milliken staff members.

Braithwaite was Milliken's campaign manager and executive assistant for 14 years; Weeks, a Detroit News columnist, served as either press secretary or chief of staff for all of Milliken's 14 years in office.

But it, too, is pretty boring, except for a page or two of political cartoons near the end of the book — most of them connecting Milliken with — guess who? — Coleman Young.

Sill, Milliken is wonderfully photogenic and a heck of a nice guy. Maybe I expect too much.

IN THE Reuther biography, it is a loving daughter, Elisabeth Reuther Dickmeyer, who does the telling.

The book is called "Reuther: A Daughter Strikes" (Spelman Publishers, Box 3333, Farm-



book break

Mona Grigg

'The fiction world beckons, and I've been wanting to explore its possibilities for a long time.'

— Mona Grigg

book break columnist

ington Hills 48333, \$21.95 Hardbound, \$14.95, softbound), with a forward by Doug Fraser.

In all fairness, I have not seen the review copy. I can only quote the press release and wish that all it says is true.

"The blast from a would-be assassin's shotgun . . . plunged all Reuthers into a lifetime of strict security, constant bodyguards, bulletproof windows and vests, barbed wire — and constant fear. Brother Victor was shot next."

"Then there were the anonymous threats and charges by J. Edgar Hoover. But there were good times, too. All are described in Elisabeth Reuther Dickmeyer's 400-page account of Walter Reuther's two lives — as UAW president and as a devoted husband and father."

ALONG THE way, the family was exposed to figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, JFK, Martin Luther King and India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Then, in 1970, it all came to an end when Walter Reuther and his wife, May, were killed in a plane crash. Dickmeyer suggests possible sabotage.

Partly because of an enlightening trip to India with her father, Dickmeyer became a Hare Krishna devotee and collaborated with Alfred Ford, great-grandson of Henry Ford, to convert the Ford Mustang into a Hare Krishna temple.

It has not been my policy to mention a book until I've seen the hard copy, and I hesitate to do it now. Objectivity aside, much of what I want from this book may be wishful thinking.

How did the family cope with notoriety? With unrelenting fear? With death? And what was Walter Reuther really like?

SO, IF I haven't read the book, why am I even bringing it up? Because any book about the Reuthers is important because I wanted to mention it along with the other two biographies — the lives of all three influential men interconnected at crucial periods in Michigan's history — and because this will be my last column for a while.

I'm taking a sabbatical of sorts — for how long, I can't say. The fiction world beckons and I've been wanting to explore its possibilities for a long time. I may well get lost — hopelessly lost — but I wouldn't miss the trip for anything.

But not to worry — Book Break will continue and an interim columnist will be announced within two weeks.

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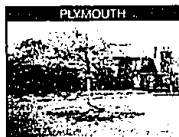
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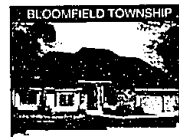
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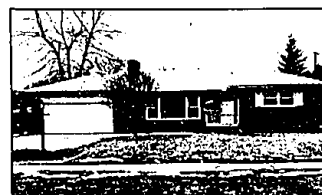
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