

proportions of minority seniors drives up the cost-of-living indexes (though this might have something to do with concentration of immigrant minority seniors in large cities).

Although climate and recreational factors might be largely beyond human control, Lockhart and Giles-Sims conclude that quality of life for aging Americans is largely dependent upon variables relating to culture, economic resources, politics, and public policy: “a cultural orientation towards using public policy to improve the lives of a large proportion of the population as possible coupled with the material capacity to support this inclination explain a good deal of the variation in SSF across the American states” (p. 139).

Of course, age differences are increasingly intertwined with other sociological factors, especially class and race. Indeed, the stark demographic differences among states presented throughout the book provide ample temptation to digress into these related factors. The regional differences in poverty, high inequality ratios, class, race/ethnicity, and public and private health insurance coverage (or lack thereof) fairly shout at social science readers familiar with health-care statistics and with demographic change. (The multivariate analyses of the prolific Brookings Institution demographer William Frey come to mind.) Lockhart and Giles-Sims might have paid a bit more attention to race/ethnicity and, perhaps, to gender: Women usually outlive men by several years, are more independent, and tend to have stronger social networks. But, by and large, the authors are to be commended for keeping a tight focus on the topic at hand: matching citizens’ needs at various stages of aging to the ways in which states provide services and opportunities appropriate to those stages.

The tidal wave of 78 million baby boomers is rolling into the choices and dilemmas outlined in *Aging Across the United States*. (Indeed, many boomers—like the authors—may already be grappling with these matters as they care for older parents.) Lockhart and Giles-Sims provide a sophisticated road map for the changing terrain of retirement and aging. Their book combines scholarship with very useful information for a general audience and deserves wide notice. The editors at Penn State Press have wisely recognized this and *Aging Across the United States* will shortly appear in a more reasonably priced paperback edition.

**One Nation under AARP: The Fight over Medicare, Social Security, and America’s Future.** By Frederick R.

Lynch. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. 288p. \$60.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.

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— Ted Marmor, *Yale University*

Frederick Lynch, self-described as a “politically incorrect sociologist,” has written an unusual and engaging account of the political role of the AARP (formerly the American

Association of Retired Persons). It is the work of an industrious, determined organizational analyst, scholarship that does not proceed from familiar models of interest-group behavior but builds instead on gerontological research about aging cohorts. The book is concerned most of all with whether the AARP, conceived initially as a politically restrained provider of services to comfortable older Americans, will become the political equivalent for defending Medicare and Social Security that the Chamber of Commerce has been for protecting business interests against regulatory expansionism.

Three issues dominate Lynch’s scholarly agenda. First, there is the question of concerning the difference that the aging of the so-called “baby boomers” will make for American politics generally. This inclusion has a contemporary and prospective focus: “Are aging boomers a sleeping political giant?” The second topic is the relationship between the “seventy-eight million aging boomers and the forty-million member AARP” (p. 3). (It is worth noting that half of AARP’s members are, as Lynch emphasizes, “*not* retired.”) What kind of political organization is it—one servicing very diverse subgroups of those over 50 or one leading seniors in the defense of Medicare and Social Security in the budget struggles so sharply illuminated in the deficit debates of 2012–13? Lastly, Lynch takes up the way that “aging boomers and AARP are negotiating” what he terms the “increasingly competitive, globalized ‘super-capitalism,’ major demographic changes, and the rise of a ‘Post-American World’” (pp. 4–5). What is of concern here is how Americans born in the middle of the twentieth century—and an AARP that emerged at that time—will cope with the very different socioeconomic and political environment of the twenty-first century.

This is a considerable agenda, and the book copes unevenly with the complexities raised by the issues. Lynch ably and extensively documents the realities of the diverse category of American seniors. He acknowledges, as the late Robert Binstock insisted, that those over 65 are a demographic category, not a unified political constituency. They share an interest in Medicare and Social Security, but carry into older age the divisions of class, culture, and experience. The book highlights this diversity and brings empirical grounding to the often loose discussion of aging in American political analysis.

The same cannot be said for the discussion of ways in which AARP and the aging of the American population will shape the current and projected struggles over Medicare and Social Security. Here, there is a substantial gulf between what political scientists and policy analyst would take for granted as necessary background and what Lynch’s approach provides. The book begins with the fiscal realities of what has come to be known as the “Great Recession.” How the fiscal policy of the early 2000s, combined with the deficit explosion post-2008, brought Medicare and Social Security to front-page prominence is the focus

of Lynch's attention. But it is the attention a gerontologist brings to bear, not what the readers of this journal might have expected. The contemporary press's accounts are prominent, along with interviews of leaders within AARP and among political elites. The book jacket's claim that AARP "set[s] the national agenda for Medicare and Social Security" is not convincing; it would be more accurate to say that AARP has increasingly become outspoken in its defense of traditional Medicare and Social Security and that, because of its support for Obamacare, the organization has produced conflict with the more conservative members of the organization.

What is missing from the Medicare and Social Security story is analysis of the arguments about the state of the programs and the accuracy of the claims made about them. There is literally no mention of the scholarship prompted by these major programs of American government. The index has Karl Marx (p. 270) but not Bruce Vladeck, the former head of Medicare in the Clinton administration and a widely published commentator. There is a citation to Dr. Ruth Westheimer's views on a sexuality panel at an AARP gathering (p. 275) but not to Nancy Altman, whose book on Social Security took up so many of the debates about the program's past, present, and future. Indeed, there is little or no history of either program. The point here is not criticism but clarification. This is not a book that illuminates what the fights have been about so much as it is an analysis of an organization's operational mode, its present efforts in these debates, and its potential to play a larger role if its membership continues to grow.

It is also noteworthy that the analysis does not pay much attention to the economics of politics literature that has been so influential in interest-group scholarship. So, for example, one way of thinking of the AARP would be to emphasize how clearly the group illustrates the dilemmas that Mancur Olson highlighted. To the extent the AARP protects the interests of Medicare beneficiaries, that benefit is available to any beneficiary, not just to AARP members. In short, the organization produces what Olson and others call "public goods," available to all if available to any. No organization can survive the production of such goods—absent an endowment or taxing power. The resolution, as Olson rightly emphasized decades ago, is to produce selective goods, benefits available only to members of the group who have paid dues. And so it is that AARP distributes discounts on goods and services, delivers a monthly magazine full of stories and information relevant to the lives of many over 50, and generally "services" its membership. With 40 million-plus members, AARP is huge, but with its modest dues and selective rewards, one cannot infer much from the membership numbers about the intensity with which individual members regard the organization.

Lynch is most engagingly searching—yet inconclusive—when he turns to AARP's future role. He rightly notes

that there are no escaping future debates about the affordability of Medicare and Social Security. This was true even in 2000 when our fiscal circumstances were so flush that economic commentators talked of substantially reducing the national debt, let alone of attempting to put Social Security's surplus in a "lockbox." If the proportion of the population over 65 will increase from 12% to 18% by the first two decades of the twenty-first century, debate about public retirement and the medical programs on which they depend cannot escape scrutiny. Lynch's focus, consistent with his training and intentions, is on the organizational tensions—and opportunities—that these present and predicted debates provoke. He discusses at length the sharp criticism some AARP members have made of the organization's public support of the Obama administration's health reform. The strategy and tactics of organizational leaders are the obvious themes, but the book rightly emphasizes that the protections Medicare and Social Security have enjoyed will be challenged by critics using the language of affordability, not programmatic desirability.

Evaluated as a guide for understanding this interest group, *One Nation under AARP* is a helpful and stimulating case study. As a guide to the politics of Medicare and Social Security, it is a partial but useful addition to the literature.

**Public Engagement for Public Education: Joining Forces to Revitalize Democracy and Equalize Schools.**

Edited by Marion Orr and John Rogers. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. 344p. \$70.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

**A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform.**

By Mark R. Warren, Karen L. Mapp, and The Community Organizing and School Reform Project. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 328p. \$99.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592713001722

— Luke Bretherton, *Duke University*

These two books can be read together as companion volumes. Both make a case for the "democratic promise of public education" (*A Match on Dry Grass*, p. 12), seeing schools and their reform as a strategic domain in which democratic citizenship is exercised and enhanced.

*A Match on Dry Grass* develops a series of interlinked case studies of the ways in which community organizing—in its various guises—enables low-income groups to address inequalities in educational provision at a local and state level. The constructive thesis developed overall is that the cases it narrates are indicative of a new movement committed to the transformation of public education (p. 4). In contrast, *Public Engagement for Public Education* focuses on a broader repertoire of strategies for contending with inequalities of educational provision. So in addition to community organizing, the strategies discussed include coalition building, coproduction