

Reviews

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K. Warner Schaie and Glen Elder (eds), *Historical Influences on Lives and Aging*, Springer Publishing Company, New York, 2005, 320 pp., hbk \$65, ISBN 13: 978 08261 2405 0.

This is the 17th in a series of volumes on *Societal Impacts on Aging*, all edited by K. Warner Schaie at Pennsylvania State University and based on conference proceedings held at its Gerontology Centre. The co-editor for this volume on historical influences on lives, Glen Elder, is a major pioneer in the development of lifecourse studies in the social sciences, and very well known for his work on three topics relevant to this volume: the influence of the Great Depression of the 1930s on American lives, the personal and family impacts of military and wartime experience, and the effects of rural change and dislocation on the inter-generational dynamics of ageing.

These interests are reflected in some of the topics that are discussed in this volume, in particular the influence of active service during the Second World War and the Korean War on American soldiers, and of the welfare policy changes introduced by President Clinton's administration on low-income adults. In addition, two other broad topics are considered in depth: the effects of major shifts in American history, including the Civil War, and the influence of changing trends in immigration, through which the United States was created. The two remaining topics are interrelated and not American: the transition from communism in the former Soviet Union, and post-service employment among Russian army officers.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire was one of the major world events during the later 20th century, and provided excellent opportunities for study of adaptation to historical disjunction at various stages of the lifecourse. There have been huge implications for older people's sense of identity as members of the generation that defeated Nazism and contributed to the many achievements of post-1945 Soviet society (Coleman and Podolskij 2007). The focus of the chapters in this volume, however, is on young to middle-aged adults, the life careers of a sample of 1983–84 graduates from secondary schools in 15 regions of the Soviet Union that were followed until 1997–99. Another sample was of military personnel who left the Russian armed services early following a drastic downsizing during the 1990s. The data collected from these informants is of considerable interest to students of adult development. In any drastic social change there are likely to be winners and losers. In the case of post-Soviet Union countries, it has generally been the young who have benefited from the new opportunities. Discarding older patterns of thinking has been much harder for middle-aged adults. General Aleksandr Lebed, who made the transition to regional government, is quoted as saying, 'I was in the military for 26 years. I left five years ago and found myself in another world. I very quickly realised that the world had no need of all the skills and knowledge that I'd acquired in the past and I began to get rid of them one-by-one' (p. 205). The cohort of 1983–84 graduates are of particular interest because

of the major disjunction in their subsequent histories, from extreme riches to impoverishment. Education, self-rated abilities, personal goals and self-efficacy all emerge as important variables contributing to success.

The character of the volume, a detailed presentation of a specific topic, followed by two expert commentaries, usually one from the author's discipline and one from another, is an attractive model. British readers will be particularly interested in the American scholars Carolyn Aldwin and Michael Levenson's account of their study of 'Chelsea Pensioners' and their 300-year-old 'hospital' that provides accommodation mainly for retired non-commissioned officers from a working-class background. Despite high rates of war service disability, the benefits of military service, including emotional maturation and skill increases, impressed the researchers more. They also saw the Royal Hospital Chelsea as a possible model for co-operative elder housing.

Reference

Coleman, P. G. and Podolskij, A. 2007. Identity loss and recovery in the life stories of Soviet World War II Veterans. *The Gerontologist*, **47**, 1, 52–60.

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Jan Baars and Henk Visser (eds), *Ageing and Time: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, Baywood, Amityville, New York, 2007, 216 pp., hbk \$47.95, ISBN 13: 978 0 89503 367 3.

Time and ageing are at the heart of gerontology. Yet we have only a vague idea of what time is. We only know that it passes. All the contributors to this volume agree that time is meaningless. Does that mean that ageing is also empty? Quite to the contrary, the intent of this book is to discover the meaning of ageing by demonstrating that there is more to time than the flat index of chronology. Most of the authors are European scholars from philosophy, psychology, physics and physiology. They ask important questions which are rarely explored in gerontology. Chronology is a seductive way to organise data simply because it is parsimonious, elegant, easy to use, and has the illusion of being beyond culture, but chronological age is as cultural as it can be. After all it took some 18,000 years to invent, beginning with the Magdalenian calendar sticks of Palaeolithic Europe to the Gregorian reform of 1582. It is also a multicultural invention that conjures a cultural calendar to subdue the irregularities of nature. The distinctive contribution of this volume is that it asks us to look at time differently. Because ageing is concerned with what happens in time, we are impressed with not only the multi-dimensional nature of time, but also with its complexity.

The book has ten chapters. The first and the last by the editors effectively integrate the themes of the book. Jan Baars, in the second chapter, argues for a triple temporality of time to do justice to the complexity of human ageing. This