

The very appealing main title of this book refers to the common impression that time seems to pass faster as we grow older. Readers attracted by the title must be warned, however, that this issue is discussed specifically in only one chapter of the book (chapter 14, of which title is the same). A variety of topics related to autobiographical memory are dealt with in the other chapters, with a general tendency for the structure of the book to follow the chronology of the life-course: issues relevant to earlier memories of life preceding those related to aging. The chapters are relatively independent of one another, however, so they need not to be read in their order of presentation. Various themes pertaining to memory as experienced in everyday life, including unusual phenomena, are discussed. Some are related to pathology, like the savant syndrome, a unique condition in which people considered as intellectually challenged possess extraordinary abilities like musical memory, artistic talent, or calculating abilities (often related to days and dates of the calendar). Some phenomena described in this book appear in extreme conditions: the detrimental effect of traumatic experiences in concentration camps during World War II (chapter 10: "Trauma and Memory: The Demjanjuk Case"),

or the panoramic view of memories of one's life during near-death experiences (chapter 16: "I Saw My Life Flash before Me").

I truly enjoyed this book. The text is written with much grace and sensitivity. It is easy to feel the author's compassion for those whose stories are relayed (e.g., the 83-year-old woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease who no longer remembers that her husband died eight years ago). This feature of the book is particularly refreshing in a literature often characterized by its somewhat dry academic style.

This book was on the short list for the General Prize of the Aventis Prizes for Science Books' (U.K.) in 2005, awarded for the best books in popular science writing. This recognition underscores that, in addition to being a very pleasant read, this book is both informative and accessible. It will captivate anyone who is interested in the topic of human memory. Many historical facts and anecdotes are relevant to topics traditionally covered in psychology classes on memory, so students as well as more specialized readers will find valuable information in this book. One minor point: Some readers, including me, will miss an index of subjects.

Robert B. Hudson (Ed.). *The New Politics of Old Age Policy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Thomas R. Klassen, York University

---

### RÉSUMÉ

Le vieillissement de la population fait en sorte que les politiques concernant les personnes âgées attirent de plus en plus l'attention des gouvernements. Aux États-Unis, les deux principaux programmes pour les personnes âgées sont le programme d'assurance-vieillesse du volet sécurité sociale et le programme Medicare. *The New Politics of Old Age Policy* examine les enjeux liés ces programmes aux nouvelles conditions démographiques. Le thème du livre porte sur le degré de responsabilité de l'État plutôt que celles des individus en ce qui a trait au soutien des personnes âgées. En général, le livre est une introduction intéressante à la politique de sécurité du revenu aux États-unis. Toutefois, ses nombreuses répétitions, le traitement superficiel des sujets et son manque de cohérence en limite quelque peu la portée.

---

The aging of the baby boomers is increasingly obvious. That our head of state, Queen Elizabeth II is 79; that Prime Minister Jean Chrétien governed until age 70, while his successor Paul Martin assumed office at 65, are the most obvious signs of some of the political implications of the demographic trends. It is certain that the unprecedented number of citizens reaching the age officially defined as *old* will

dramatically shape politics and policy for the coming decades. As Robert B. Hudson notes in the introductory chapter to his edited collection, *The New Politics of Old Age Policy*, it is unclear whether the increased size and influence of older citizens will translate into improved social programs for them or even into the protection of the *status quo*. The impact of a larger number of older voters is particularly

uncertain once today's workers are the ones taxed to pay for the social programs of an expanding retired population. Indeed, the theme of the volume is the degree to which the state, rather than individuals and families, should be responsible for supporting the elderly.

In the United States of America, although the demography is similar to that of Canada, a quite different cultural and institutional environment shapes the debates about old age policy. The 14 chapters in *The New Politics of Old Age Policy* outline current debates on income security policy for older individuals in the world's most economically powerful nation. Although the title of the volume includes "politics," there is relatively little analysis of the explicitly partisan, other than chapter 13, entitled "The Contemporary Politics of Old Age Policies", which briefly reviews the stances taken by major old age interest groups and political parties in the past several decades. Readers interested in how political parties, pressure groups, and the electoral process have shaped and will continue to shape policies will need to look elsewhere.

The volume's major weakness—a common one in edited collections—is that the 14 chapters lack coherence: Each chapter repeats historical and background information found in previous chapters. One early chapter on the history of the key policies and programs would considerably improve the book. Chapter 7, the econometric study of retirement pathways, with its pages of multivariate analysis results, is strangely out of keeping with all the other chapters. Some of this might be forgivable if at least the editor had sought to impose a logical structure on the chapters and their order. This, however, is not the case. For instance, an overview chapter such as chapter 13 should have been placed earlier to provide readers with some understanding of the manner in which the political process has shaped policies. Most grievously, the last chapter "Using Local Tax Levies to Fund Programs for Older People: Good Politics and Good Policy?", written by government officials, reviews how two counties in the state of Ohio have used property taxes to fund some services for older persons. How this chapter, at 10 pages, fits with the previous chapters that focused on national policy or might be a summary of key issues of the volume is left to the reader to fathom.

Given the disjointed and uneven nature of the collection, and its exclusive focus on the United States, the highlight for Canadian readers is the opportunity to gain an appreciation of just how

different Canada is from its southern neighbour vis-à-vis old age security policies.

The early chapters make clear that, although state support for the elderly in the United States (primarily the Old Age Insurance program under Social Security, and the Medicare program) is more generous than for other groups (such as working age adults and children), it pales when compared to Canada. As John Myles notes in chapter 3, the poverty rate for those 65 and older during the 1990s was below 5 per cent in Canada but above 20 per cent in the United States. Perhaps, not surprisingly, given that many of the academic contributors are from university social work and related departments, they offer a defence of the current policies and programs. The very fact that writers would need to defend the universal Social Security program from privatization and further decreases in eligibility illustrates how Canada and the United States diverge in income support policies. The volume might have been more interesting if those advocating less state support of the elderly, such as writers from conservative think tanks and economics departments, had also been represented in at least a chapter or two.

Chapters 8, 10, and 11 dealing with Medicare, the universal health insurance program for elderly persons, are particularly interesting for Canadian readers because they fit within the larger debate in both countries about state-provided health care. In the United States, the simultaneous creation of Medicare and Medicaid (the means-tested program for the poor) has meant that older citizens vigorously support Medicare, but have little incentive to use their clout to pressure decision makers to improve and expand Medicaid. However, as Marilyn Moon discusses in chapter 10, "Sustaining Medicare as an Age-Related Program", the age of eligibility for Medicare assistance is likely to increase from 65 to 67 as politicians are forced to "hold the line" on expenditures for both programs.

In conclusion, for a reader who has wondered why Social Security often is described as "the third rail of American politics", the volume will be a useful introduction to the contemporary policy—but not so much political—debates surrounding reforming this program, as well as Medicare, in the context of an aging population. However, the volume's repetitious format, superficial treatment of topics, and disjointed nature means that the reader needs to be cognizant that at best only half the chapters will prove to be worthy of note.