

historical perspective is provided by Achenbaum and Cole, who conclude that public policies in education, disability support and social security have developed incrementally and that the ageing of the population does not require a rapid change in policy direction. They see no need for the increased average age to drive public policy. In contrast, Hudson argues that age-based public policies are politically more acceptable and realistic than need-based policies. Finally, in this section, Binstock asks whether responsibility across generations is politically feasible, and concludes that politicians are unwilling to take the necessary long-term action to address the challenges of population ageing but focus on ideologically mediated short-term issues.

The final part comprises several papers on the short-term preoccupations of politicians and policy makers. Williamson provides a helpful review of the contested nature of the inter-generational debate in US politics through an analysis of 'generational equity' and 'generational interdependence' in relation to social security reform. Kingson (Chapter 14) and Diamond and Orszag (Chapter 15) provide technical accounts of developing a European style social insurance scheme for social security. In the final two chapters, Stuart and Bishop review the costs and benefits of the new Medicare Drug Benefit from economic and clinical perspectives. As said, there is something for everyone in this collection but rather little that is not available elsewhere. This would have been a more interesting book if the editors had attempted to draw all the contributions together rather than leaving it as a series of loosely-connected papers.

Institute of Health and Society and
Institute for Ageing and Health,
Newcastle University,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

JOHN BOND

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Diana K. Harris, *The Sociology of Aging*, third edition, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, 2007, 300 pp., pbk £30.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 7425 4558 8.

This is the third edition of *The Sociology of Aging* by Diana Harris, now Professor Emerita of Sociology at the University of Tennessee. One can presume, therefore, that it is not only a successful textbook but also has become a 'standard' for the vibrant American undergraduate student market. Those from outside the country cannot fail to be impressed by the number of gerontology courses available at universities across the United States. It is this market that this book aims to serve. The book has 15 chapters arranged in five sections: Introduction/overview; Culture and human behavior; Inequality; Older people and social institutions; and Major issues confronting older people. The contents for this new edition have been updated to cover the impending retirement of the baby boomers, new forms of housing, elder abuse and quality issues in nursing homes, and the challenges that confront Medicare and Social Security.

This book is very well presented and easy to read. Undoubtedly, it will be appearing on many reading lists of US courses, but it is unlikely to be widely used

in the United Kingdom as the perspective and orientation of this book is firmly rooted in the United States. Whilst there are some valuable sections, the overall slant of the book is so ethnocentric that it has little utility for readers in other parts of the world. The research and policy base that underpin the book are firmly American. Despite considerable gerontological scholarship in Europe (as evident in this journal) there are only two British references: Laslett (1965) and Young and Willmott (1957). There is no consideration of emerging research areas such as transnational and global ageing or mainstream sociological perspectives on 'the ageing body'. Indeed the sociological perspective presented here is rather traditional. Whilst there are discussions of activity theory, socialisation and cultural norms, more recent theoretical perspectives, such as those influenced by post-modernism, the ideas of Foucault and other social theorists or notions of consumption, are entirely absent. Overall this is probably a very useful book for its intended readership, American undergraduates, but the book will have little appeal beyond that market and will be of only limited value to gerontology teachers around the globe.

References

- Laslett, P. 1965. *The World We Have Lost*. Methuen, London.
 Young, M. and Willmott, P. 1957. *Family and Kinship in East London*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

School of Health and Social Care,
 University of Reading, Berkshire, UK

CHRISTINA R. VICTOR

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Allan Borowski, Elizabeth Ozanne and Sol Encel (eds), *Longevity and Social Change in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 2007, i-x + 397 pp., pbk AUS\$ 59.95, ISBN 13: 978 0 86840 889 7.

This book starts, as might be expected, with an overview of population ageing in Australia, and it succinctly explains the underlying reasons for population ageing and the attendant policy concerns. Like the United States, Australia is still relatively young by European standards (with only 13 per cent of the population aged 65 or more years in 2002). This is partly due to a much higher level of fertility during the post-war baby boom and subsequent fertility rates, although now below replacement, that are higher than most European (especially Southern European) countries. The 1950s and 1960s baby boom will of course mean a bulge in the numbers of older people when they reach later life. This chapter is quite brief and could have included more tables or charts (there are only two, one on the broad age distribution of the population and the other showing trends in youth, age and total dependency ratios). Other readers will however appreciate the clearly written text. The next chapter, by Colin Mathers, gives a more detailed overview of trends in mortality and disability, including some consideration of possible future scenarios.