



Anthropology & Aging

Journal of the Association for Anthropology & Gerontology

Book Review

What Older Americans Think: Interest Groups and Aging Policy. Christine L. Day. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2014. ISBN 978 069 160352 0, 164 pp. Price \$29.95 (Paper)

Jennifer A. Wagner, MPH, LNHA

Gerontology Program, Bowling Green State University

Anthropology & Aging, Vol 36, No 2 (2015), pp.222-223

ISSN 2374-2267 (online) DOI 10.5195/aa.2015.119



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.

This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

Book Review

What Older Americans Think: Interest Groups and Aging Policy. Christine L. Day. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2014. ISBN 978 069 160352 0, 164 pp. Price \$29.95 (Paper)

Jennifer A. Wagner, MPH, LNHA
Gerontology Program, Bowling Green State University

What older Americans think is indeed the \$64 million dollar question to which many professionals, academics, and students are looking and hoping to find an answer. The original copy of this book was printed in 1990 and the reprint was conducted in 2014. As of 2015, we still do not have the answer to this question, although we now have a great deal of insight. The purpose of this book is to provide a now historical account of the political rise of older adults as a special interest group and what makes them so unique and powerful. George Santayana has been quoted as saying, "he who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it". From that perspective, I find this book useful for those who conduct research, work as activists, or for those who provide services for older adults. Let us learn from this historical account and build upon it. Personally, I would be excited to read a second edition of this text utilizing current research. The professions of gerontology and geriatrics are ever changing. Each generation of older adults bring forward changes in knowledge, experiences, needs, and activism. The political, regulatory, and reimbursement environments affecting the economy, the healthcare system, as well as the myriad of services and programs outside the health care system would greatly benefit by such updated findings.

The first two chapters provide a historical overview of the social movements that brought older adults into the political interest group arena such as the beginning of Medicare and Social Security, as well as interest groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the Gerontological Society of America (GSA). Chapter three delves into the political attitudes of the elderly and the diversity of those attitudes. Chapter four discusses how older adult interest groups have survived despite the diversity of those attitudes. This chapter also discusses recruitment and incentive strategies of older adults by the political action and advocacy groups which promote the success of these special interest groups. Chapter five provides insight into how policies affecting older adults are developed and the factors that affect those policies by highlighting advocacy movements in the 60's, 70's, and 80's such as the Older American's Act (1965), The Employee Retirement Income Security Act (1974), and Save our Security (1981). An item that piqued my interest was the role of professionals such as senior organizations, medical associations, and nursing home organizations that play a secondary role in the advancement of policies affecting older adults (p.94). Chapter six provides a summary of who represents older adults and the hierarchy of the various interest groups and the role they play in mobilizing older adults and politicians. Chapter seven gives a conclusion by sharing thoughts on whether or not the interest groups inhibit programs or restrict policies and services for older adults. The conclusion is followed by a comprehensive appendix and bibliography which provides clarification to research tables presented throughout the chapters.

While today in 2015, I do not find the 1990 edition of the text to be of personal interest it has made me more aware of perhaps my own bias in advocacy. The population of older adults that I typically work with in nursing homes is not the majority of the older adult population. While to me their needs are often great, I do need to keep in mind their own personal autonomy regarding their needs and wants. Perhaps for others, it is their own fear of aging that motivates them to be such advocates. I feel that this would be a good resource for those who study public policy and are trying to predict patterns of special interest groups and for those who make strategic plans on how to continue to advocate for public policy and programs to serve older adults.