

**EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN:
A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF LIFE
ON THE RETIREMENT FRONTIER, 1950-2000**

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ABSTRACT

Katherine Ann Otis: Everything Old is New Again:
A Social and Cultural History of Life on the Retirement Frontier, 1950-2000
(Under the direction of Dr. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall)

“Everything Old is New Again” explores the history of aging in mid-to-late twentieth century America through the lens of retirement life in Florida, a state long synonymous with shuffleboard and park benches. Such images present a stereotypical view of old age as boring and staid. Nothing could be further from the truth. Seniors were engaged in a social, cultural, and political transformation of later life. The mass retirement of older people from the work force, combined with the creation of countless governmental programs as well as commercial projects designed specifically for the elderly, segregated growing numbers of seniors from the larger society and stimulated the development of an age-based group-consciousness and culture. The evolution of this dynamic new peer group and the day-to-day experiences of its diverse membership – particularly among those who settled in Florida - is the subject of this dissertation.

The manuscript is divided into two thematic sections that draw on a wealth of sources including retirement literature and advice books, letters and oral histories, gerontological and sociological works, government reports and demographic data, sexual studies and surveys, institutional newsletters and meeting minutes, newspapers and magazines, advertisements, films, and photographs. Part one, “My Grandparents' World: The Construction of a Senior Culture,” documents the promises and pitfalls of post-war retirement through a examination of daily life among senior migrants to Florida. It considers the ways in which retirement

communities spurred the development of a unique subculture among older adults and helped to support senior activism when the realities of retirement left growing numbers of elders stripped of their savings, in poor health, and unable to afford basic necessities such as safe and comfortable housing, prescription drugs, and long-term care. Part two, “Waltzing with Nonno: Older Americans Negotiate New Family and Community Roles,” explores the changing nature of older Americans' interpersonal relationships. Retirement and migration, the economic and health challenges which often accompanied old age, the increasing segregation of older people from the wider community, and changing inter-generational expectations all affected retirees' relationships with one another, their families, and their communities.

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INTRODUCTION

UNEXPECTED PIONEERS: POST-WAR RETIREES REMAKE THE MEANING OF OLD AGE IN AMERICA

“Modern society ... has turned old people loose into new lifespan territory,
but it has equipped them only with medieval maps.”

David Plath.¹

“Our retirement to Florida was a breaking with the old and starting anew.
And we started in right season of the year, April – springtime.”

A post-war retiree's reflection on his move to Florida²

Frontiersmen from centuries past traveled in wagon trains. My maternal grandparents hired a U-Haul. Soon after my grandfather retired from the State Department in 1974, he and my grandmother decided to move to Florida. They had dedicated their lives to raising four children and caring for ailing parents. In the space of a few years, the last of their offspring left home, they buried each of their parents, and they faced the challenge of cleaning out their childhood homes. Some of the family furniture was divvied up among my grandparents' children. They sold much of the rest and repeated the process when they put their own home up for sale. As they loaded their small moving van, my grandparents included only the barest necessities: some pots and pans, plates and silverware, one bedroom set, and a card table and chairs. Their treasured 1959 Cadillac also made the trip. The long, black automobile with flamboyant tail fins belonged to my great grandfather who had passed away only months

1. David Plath, “Japan: The After Years,” in D.O. Cowgill and L.D. Holmes, eds., *Aging and Modernization* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972), 150.

2. Oral history conducted by the author with her grandparents, Frank and Alice DiBlasi, Dec. 3, 2005 and Dec. 4, 2005. Tapes and transcripts in the author's possession.

before.³

I try to envision the small caravan as it made its way from suburban Maryland, down I-95 to Southern Florida. Stopping at fast food restaurants and road-side motels, my grandparents – each in their mid-fifties - anticipated a fresh start to life. My grandmother had scrimped and saved, cooked and cleaned, and cared for a growing brood of children throughout her adult life. She looked forward to a future of relative leisure in a breezy Florida home furnished with brand-new furniture and appliances. My grandfather was anxious to escape the upkeep of the large family home, the traffic that clogged the Washington, D.C. beltway, and the winter ice and snow. He longed for a gentle climate where he could pursue his golf game year round. He had consulted the Weather Bureau and compared a detailed index of the average temperature and rain fall in communities across Florida before settling on a final destination.⁴

When they arrived in the gulf-coast town of Naples, my grandparents joined a fashionable community of middle- and upper-middle-class retirees. During the 1970s Naples grew from a sleepy backwater into a bustling vacation and retirement destination. My grandparents selected a new development of low-slung, three- and four-bedroom lake-side homes. Affable neighbors – all young retirees - gathered for barbecue parties and cocktails. My grandparents joined the local country club with a membership composed almost entirely of older people. My grandfather was a devoted golfer. My grandmother played bridge. They learned to ball room dance. In the evenings – between candle-lit dinner courses – they joined a sea of poised and elegant retirees on the country club's dance floor.⁵

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

Throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century hundreds of thousands of older Americans migrated to Florida. Some joined plush, resort communities such as Naples and Boca Raton. Most others secured more modest spots on the retirement frontier. They crowded the state's trailer parks, apartment complexes, and retirement hotels. Lured by warm weather, recreational opportunities, and the promise of economical living, by 1960 older migrants were streaming into the Sunshine State at a rate of 1,000 a week. As a result, the percentage of Floridians over the age of sixty-five grew from 8.5 at mid-century to 14.5 percent in 1970 and to 17.3 percent in 1980 (well above the national average of 11.4 percent).⁶

It may seem strange to describe these seniors as pioneers. After all, most retirees, like my grandparents, had a lot of time on their hands. They were removed from the workforce and apparently from the wider world. They were empty-nesters whose lives often revolved around golf and bridge games, shuffleboard competitions, day-time television dramas, doctor visits, and hospital stays. As a result, it is easy to dismiss post-war retirees as insignificant members of society. Nothing could be further from the truth. As they relocated to retirement villages, gathered in senior centers, cashed in their social security checks, and struggled with chronic disability and illness, older people engaged in an unprecedented social, cultural, and political transformation of later life. They were reinventing the meaning of old age in America.

Americans have always grown old, of course, but I argue that older Americans developed a unique, age-based culture during the post-war years. For the first time,

6. Jame F. Burns, "Patterns and Characteristics of Migration into Florida" in Carter C. Osterbind, ed, *Migration, Mobility and Aging* (Gainesville: University Presses of FL, 1974), 73-74; T. Stanton Dietrich, *Florida's Older Population: Research Report No. 2* (Tallahassee: Retirement Research Division, Florida State Improvement Commission, 1952), 12. Manning J. Dauer, "Florida Growth, the Need for Regional Planning," in Osterbind, ed, *Migration, Mobility and Aging*, 97. Carter C. Osterbind and Angela M. O'Rand, eds., *Older People in Florida: A Statistical Abstract* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1979), 3; Gary Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 131.

substantial numbers of seniors established a collective identity as retirees, as a peer group with distinctive interpersonal relationships and activities, as well as special needs and problems. At a 1961 Conference on Aging, sociologist Talcott Parsons offered a particularly apt comparison between this fledgling senior peer group and America's more-readily recognized youth culture. He noted that the "concept of youth culture has become quite familiar" and attributed its growth to the segregation of adolescence "in and around the system of formal education." In "traditional rural society where going to school beyond the sixth grade was rare, there was hardly any youth culture as we know it today," he noted. "In other words, youth has become differentiated out as a population with special status." Parsons concluded that the "same basic process of structural change ... has begun to differentiate out an aged subculture."⁷ Parsons was right. The mass retirement of older people from the work force, combined with the creation of countless governmental programs as well as commercial projects designed specifically for the elderly, segregated growing numbers of older Americans from the larger society and stimulated the development of an age-based group-consciousness and culture. The evolution of this dynamic new peer group and the day-to-day experiences of its diverse membership – particularly among those who settled in Florida - is the subject of my dissertation.

While post-war retirees participated in the modern-day transformation of later life, a handful of scholars pioneered a new perspective on the historical meanings and significance of old age. In the 1970s historians were just beginning to explore the ways in which age – like race, class, and sex – shaped the human experience. Life-stage experiences, they discovered, varied across cultures, time, and place. Historical monographs on old age in

7. Talcott Parsons, "The Cultural Background of Today's Aged," in Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbitts, ed., *Politics of Age* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 11.

America were non-existent before the publications of *Growing Old in America* by David Hackett Fischer in 1977 and *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* by Andrew Achenbaum a year later.⁸ A number of other studies soon followed, including *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution* by William Graebner (1980), *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America's Past* by Carole Haber (1983), *Urban Elders: Family, Work, and Welfare Among Boston's Aged* by Brian Gratton (1986), *Old Age in a Bureaucratic Society: The Elderly, the Experts, and the State in American History* by David Van Tassel and Peter Stearns (1986), and *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* by Thomas Cole (1992).⁹

These scholars founded an important new field of study. Yet later generations of historians failed to follow in these pioneers' footsteps. The history of old age remains underdeveloped and overlooked. In a 1996 review in the *Journal of Social History*, Achenbaum lamented the fact that “gerontological history's promise has yet to be realized.” “More than two decades have passed since David Van Tassel ... convened three dozen scholars, assistant professors, and graduate students to identify key questions about the meanings and experiences of growing older,” he noted. “During that period, other fields – as disparate as gay/lesbian studies and inquiries into antebellum African-American religion – have attracted far more excitement among historians. In contrast, most of the U.S.

8. David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1977); W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

9. William Graebner, *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of An American Institution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Carole Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America's Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray: Old Age, American Values, and Federal Policies Since 1920* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983); Brian Gratton, *Urban Elders: Family, Work, and Welfare Among Boston's Aged* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); David Van Tassel and Peter Stearns, *Old Age in a Bureaucratic Society: The Elderly, the Experts, and the State in American History* (Westport: Greenwood, 1986); Thomas Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

monographs about the history of old age and gerontology have been written by men and women whose interest in the topic stretches decades.”¹⁰

Twelve years later, Achenbaum's assessment still stands. Over the course of my graduate studies, I have met just two other students pursuing doctoral dissertations on the history of old age in America. It is especially interesting to note that the history of childhood and adolescence - which emerged at roughly same time as old age history - is now a well-established, thriving field. Many hundreds of studies explore topics as diverse as childrearing practices, children's health, labor, and education, juvenile delinquency, teenage sexuality, and the material culture of childhood.¹¹ There is a Society for the History of Children and Youth as well as a website, newsletter, journal, and conference devoted to the field.¹²

Why have historians embraced the study of children and young adults while older people remain largely overlooked? Cultural stereotypes about the aged are to partly blame. Historians, like the general public, are inundated with media images and reports that associate old age with the loss of health, wealth, and independence. Fear of our own aging

10. W. Andrew Achenbaum, Review of David Kertzer and Peter Laslett, eds., *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 1996), 538.

11. The following sample comprises but a small fraction of the works produced within the now prodigious field of childhood and adolescent history. The depth and variety of these studies (drawn from the American field) is impressive: Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1977); Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (NY: Basic Books, 1985); Miriam Formanek-Brunell, *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Charles King, *Children's Health in America: A History* (NY: Twayne of Macmillan, 1993); Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995); LeRoy Ashby, *Endangered Children: Dependence, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (NY: Twayne Publishers, 1997); James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); William Whittaker, *Child Labor in America: History, Policy, and Legislative Issues* (NY: Novinka Books, 2004); Paula Fass, *Children of a New World: Society, Culture, and Globalization* (NY: New York University Press, 2007).

12. See the Society for the History of Children and Youth website: www.h-net.org/~child/SHCY/index.htm.

may prevent us from exploring a stage of life that we incessantly try to keep at bay. Perhaps even more important, though, is the pervasive belief that older people are unable to respond flexibly to new circumstances, to adapt in the face of social change. The elderly, in other words, are too often viewed as historical artifacts rather than as history makers. Historians might turn to older people for oral histories that shed light on the earlier eras of their youth, but few consider the ways in which older men and women are themselves agents of change.

Even within monographs devoted to the history of aging, older people appear mostly as the objects of programs and policies created by the middle-aged.¹³ Works to date generally falls into two categories. They are either sweeping overviews – surveys that span centuries in a single book, or detailed evaluations of specific governmental programs that affected older citizens. These studies track long-term trends and posit important watersheds. They provide necessary institutional perspectives. What is missing, however, are the day-to-day experiences and perspectives of older people as they respond dynamically to changing times.

In this study, older men and women emerge as important historical actors. To that end, I combine a broad look at the social and institutional history of old age in twentieth-century America with a fine-grained study of the daily lives of retirees to Southern Florida. By exploring the social and cultural aspects of retirement at the local level, this history offers new insights into older Americans' perceptions of retirement and the aging process. It also asks how governmental programs and big-business enterprises shaped older men's and women's personal experiences and choices, how they responded to societal expectations

13. One exception is Terri Premo's study *Winter Friends*. Premo examines of the personal experiences of aging among middle- and upper-middle-class American women during the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is important to note, however, that the bulk of the survey is limited letters and diaries written by a small handful of elite, New England women. *Winter Friends: Women Growing Old in the New Republic, 1785-1835* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

about proper age-related roles and behaviors, and how they adapted to changing positions within their families and communities.

During the twentieth century, Florida emerged as a preeminent retirement destination. It has consistently ranked first among the most popular places for older migrants from across the country to call home. A vibrant cultural center for aging Americans with a wide variety of backgrounds, the state provides a rich case-study of the history of post-war retirement, the development of a peer-group culture among retirees, and the institutions and policies that both created and responded to retirees' special needs. Florida also offers a useful point of comparison with broader national trends and regional differences. For example, although most retired migrants arrived with good health and a life-time of savings, Americans' increasing life span, a dramatic rise in medical costs, and the declining financial power of frail and aging retirees soon placed tremendous pressure on the state's welfare system. As a result, the urgency of long-term care in Florida quickly outpaced and foreshadowed the growing needs of graying communities across America. I also draw comparisons between retirees who migrated to the Sunshine State and those stayed behind. Elderly Jewish immigrants who remained in their old Northeastern neighborhoods, for example, often felt increasingly isolated as young family members moved away and the demographics of their communities changed. Their elderly friends and neighbors who retired to Florida, meanwhile, took comfort in the thriving senior Jewish culture they helped to create in tight-knit migrant communities such as South Beach.

This study is divided into two thematic sections that draw on a wealth of diverse sources including popular retirement literature and advice books, older Floridians' letters and oral histories, gerontological and sociological works, sexual studies and surveys, government

reports and demographic data, institutional newsletters and meeting minutes, newspapers and magazines, children's literature, films, advertisements, and photographs. Part one, "My Grandparents' World: The Construction of a Senior Culture," includes three chapters that consider the promises and pitfalls of post-war retirement through a examination of daily life among senior migrants to Florida. I explore the ways in which retirement communities spurred the development of a unique subculture among older adults and helped to support senior activism when the realities of retirement left growing numbers of elders stripped of their savings, in poor health, and unable to afford basic necessities such as safe and comfortable housing, prescription drugs, and long-term care.

Chapter one, "How to Retire to Florida and Trade Old Lives for New: Selling the Diamond Years to Seniors," explores the ways in which ad men, retirement writers, and Florida boosters convinced growing numbers of older Americans not only to embrace retirement, but also to leave their old homes and communities behind for a fresh start in the Sunshine State. By 1950 Florida swarmed with retired salesmen, teachers, army officers, and thousands of other working- and middle-class retirees whose pensions supported the purchase of their own little corner of paradise. Retirement homes and subdivisions sprouted up across the state, many marketed through the mail on installment schemes. In assessing this dramatic post-war migration, "How to Retire to Florida" asks: Why were fixed-income, budget-conscious retirees so attractive to Florida boosters, builders, and businessmen? Was there a typical Florida retiree? Which Americans were excluded from Florida retirement and why? What convinced so many older migrants to sell their homes and leave friends and family behind? What great expectations did these seniors carry with them as they packed their cars and headed south?

Chapter two, “Segregating the Sunset Years: The Realities of Life on the Retirement Frontier,” explores the physical and cultural environments of Florida's age-segregated retirement hotels, villages, and trailer parks as well as public housing towers and nursing homes. Articles and advertisements in magazines such as *Modern Maturity* attached a certain cachet to retirement communities and the “leisure lifestyles” they supported. This chapter asks: What was the appeal of age-segregated living and what were the drawbacks? How did retirees spend their time? What social and cultural customs and beliefs evolved inside these retirement hotels and subdivisions? What happened when older migrants' health failed and savings dwindled? What community and governmental support systems existed for Florida's oldest and frailest seniors?

Chapter three, “‘Kindly Give This Letter Your Personal Attention’: Reexamining the Senior Power Movement Through Retirees' Correspondence with Congressman Claude Pepper and Senator George Smathers,” explores post-war retirees' growing group-consciousness and political activism. Scholarly and popular reviews of the senior power movement tend to analyze the lobbying efforts of senior-advocacy organizations at their top leadership levels or focus on the headline-stealing demonstrations of the relatively small numbers of radical senior activists. Observers have paid less attention to ordinary older Americans. The personal stories and political demands detailed in the many thousands of letters written by Florida retirees to Congressman Claude Pepper and Senator George Smathers provide a unique window into the socio-political outlook of mid-century seniors and offer a fresh prospective on the senior power movement. Drawing on a close analysis of hundreds of these letters, chapter three asks: What happened when Florida retirees faced unexpected economic hardship, age discrimination, and an increasing need for over-stretched

governmental services? Why did so many retirees engage in letter writing campaigns while eschewing more radical forms of protest? What changes did correspondents hope to achieve? What were the costs and the benefits of their political choices?

Part two, “Waltzing with Nonno: Older Americans Negotiate New Family and Community Roles,” includes three chapters which consider the changing nature of older Americans' interpersonal relationships. Although old age is frequently perceived as a stagnant and uneventful stage of life, post-war retirees faced considerable social and psychological adjustments. Retirement and migration, the economic and health challenges which often accompanied old age, the increasing segregation of older people from the wider community, and changing inter-generational expectations all affected retirees' relationships with one another, their families, and their communities.

Chapter four, “Invasion of the Body Snatchers: Grandparents' Changing Place within the Post-war Family” evaluates older people's position within the contemporary kinship system with a focus on the rising public anxiety which surrounded post-war grandparents' roles, obligations, and influence. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, experts repeatedly warned parents against overly-assertive grandparents and urged older Americans to release young family members from their clutches. Yet just a decade later, grandparents faced a rash of completely contradictory criticism. Commentators now descried the loss of close family ties and berated grandparents for abandoning their responsibilities. By the 1970s and 1980s grandparents joined a growing list of culprits – including working mothers and single and divorced parents - accused of fomenting crisis among neglected, depressed, and under-achieving children. Judging from popular accounts, every retiree in America absconded to Florida, far from the youngsters who needed them most. This chapter asks: What stereotypes

and myths did postwar Americans attach to grandparenthood? Why did critics raise alarm bells over grandparents' changing place within the postwar family? How did public fears about the unraveling of the modern American family compare with private realities, especially in terms of older people's relationships with children? Did these realities vary depending on grandparents' class, race, and gender? What does the future hold for grandparents as rising divorce rates and growing numbers of single-parent as well gay and lesbian-headed households create even more fluid and diverse family forms?

Chapter five, "When I'm Sixty-Four: Reexamining the Sexual Revolution, Senior Style," exposes a dramatic shift in romantic and sexual practices among older Americans. During the 1960s and 1970s love was in the air in Haight Ashbury, but it also wafted through American retirement villages. In Florida and across the United States marriages among older couples were on the rise as were the numbers of seniors "living in sin." Married or not, sex was discussed more frequently and openly among older adults than ever before. Growing numbers of popular and academic publications on sexuality and aging confirmed this interest, as did symposiums that dealt frankly with questions among aging men and women about sexual function and fulfillment. This exploration of the steamy side to senior culture asks: How and why did senior sexuality become a topic of concern among postwar retirees and researchers? How did sex and romance affect retirees' everyday lives? Did old age shape men and women's sexuality in different ways? What was the impact of old age on homosexual relationships? How did extended family members and the general public respond to this blossoming of senior romance? What taboos against sexual expression in later life were washed away and which remained?

Chapter six, "Bubbes on the Beach: Judaism, Gender, and the Retirement Frontier,"

explores the ways in which ethnicity, religion, and gender shaped later life. Although the white middle- and working-classes composed the majority of Florida retirees, it is a mistake to assume that the suntanned seniors who crowded the state's park benches and shuffleboard courts experienced old age in similar ways. The Sunshine State was an ethnically diverse setting that included Cuban, French-Canadian, Italian-American, and Finnish-American retirement communities, among others. As growing numbers of Jewish Americans from across the Northeast and Central United States joined the gray migration, they settled in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties. By 1980 the Jewish population within this tri-county area reached more than half a million, the second largest Jewish community in the country. "Bubbes on the Beach" highlights aspects of history and culture that helped to shape the later lives of these South Florida migrants. It pays particular attention to female retirees and suggests that the generational experiences of Eastern European immigrant women and their daughters provided many elderly Jewish women with the skills and self-esteem needed to combat the isolation and poverty which often accompanies old age. This chapter asks: What did Jewish traditions and contemporary sermons teach about social responsibility for aging relatives and community members? How did American Jewish culture and experience influence the living arrangements and social support networks among retirees, particularly older immigrant women? As American elders grow increasingly diverse, what lessons can be learned from ethnic communities like the ones that flourished in South Florida?

Today, thirty years after they retired to Florida, my grandparents' home is warm and familiar and bursting with treasured possessions. The well-worn, orange and brown flowered sofa sits dependably next to my grandfather's white leather recliner. A sea shell collection gathers dust on the coffee table. My grandparents' photographs of sunsets, piers, and pelicans

grace the walls just as they did when I was small. Snap shots of retirement travel, family reunions, and a golden wedding anniversary celebration cover side tables and night stands. These familiar objects are the artifacts of my grandparents' many years of retirement – a period that comprises more than a third of their lives. Now in their mid-eighties, my grandparents have started to slow down. Bad backs and arthritic hips and knees prevent them from dancing. My grandfather plays only an occasional round of golf. He devotes much of his time, instead, to editing family photographs on the computer. My grandmother remains an avid bridge player. A few nights a week my grandparents still catch up with old friends over dinner at the club. They sit and watch the younger crowd – men and women in their mid-to-late-sixties - who comprise the newest members of the Naples retirement community.

PART ONE

MY GRANDPARENTS' WORLD: THE CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN SENIOR SUBCULTURE

In 1992 my family traveled to Florida to celebrate my grandparents' golden wedding anniversary. As we gathered for the festivities, I surveyed the scene. The elaborate party - held in the ballroom of my grandparents' country club - reminded me of other rites of passage. Like a Bar Mitzvah or wedding reception, guests arrived carefully coiffed and donned their best attire. My mother made a champagne toast. Close friends rose to offer their congratulations and to 'roast' the couple of the hour. The orchestra played big band music and couples crowded the dance floor. With the exception of my sister and parents, aunts, uncles, and two young cousins, the room was filled almost exclusively with older people. As they gathered at by the buffet table and chatted over drinks, their conversations included the familiar range of the topics I had grown accustomed to hearing during my many trips to Florida. The retirees swapped stories about recent vacation travels and bragged about their children's and grandchildren's accomplishments. They compared golf scores and offered tips for improving swings. They gossiped about friends' and neighbors' health conditions and hospital stays and described their own recent operations.

Since the 1970s my sister and I had spent numerous vacations and holidays in Florida. During those visits, we appeared to be the only children around for miles. Surrounded by a sea of tan and active elders, I was fascinated by the world my grandparents

inhabited. Back home, our days were filled with school work, piano lessons, and chores. My parents rushed to work, attended PTA meetings, paid bills, cleaned house, and ran errands. I envied older people's ability to devote so much of their time to relaxation and leisure. For a long while this is what I thought it meant to grow older: You worked hard throughout your adult life. By the time your hair turned silver, you had earned the right to a long and luxurious vacation in the company of other seniors. I considered retirement and older people's segregation from the wider community a natural life-stage progression. It appeared to be a simple fact of life.

As we celebrated my grandparents' fiftieth wedding anniversary, however, I began to wonder more about retiree culture. Had older people always retired and did they retire by choice? What lured so many elderly migrants to Florida? Certainly warm weather and ample recreation had their appeal, but what were the consequences of leaving family members, community networks, and so much personal history behind? I wondered too about the majority of retirees who lived beyond the glitzy subdivisions of Naples, Florida. Many American seniors depended on their small, monthly social security checks just to purchase basic necessities. How did these men and women afford retirement and how did their lives differ from those of my grandparents? As the years passed, I also grew more aware of the ways in which time and ailments altered retirement. Although my grandmother and grandfather remained in remarkably good health, increasing numbers of their friends and neighbors suffered from strokes, falls, and heart-attacks. If they survived, chronic pain and disability often left these retirees housebound or confined to nursing homes.

Part one of this study, "My Grandparents World: The Construction of American Senior Subculture" examines retirement and retiree culture through the eyes of older

Americans who migrated to Florida during the mid-twentieth century. Senior peer-group culture evolved in a wide variety of settings, including upscale retirement villages and condominiums, modest retirement hotels and trailer parks, and age-segregated public housing towers and nursing homes. The three chapters in this section provide a history of these settings, the government programs and institutions that shaped them, and the men and women who inhabited them. I examine the myths and promises that drew older people to Florida, the realities of daily life once seniors settled in the Sunshine State, and the ways in which an age-based group consciousness and culture helped migrants negotiate the often unexpected minefields of old age and retirement.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW TO RETIRE TO FLORIDA AND TRADE OLD LIVES FOR NEW: SELLING THE 'DIAMOND YEARS' TO SENIORS

An Invitation To East Ridge: A New Outlook on Aging and Retirement

Trudging down the driveway through the snow and ice, Arthur Steed¹⁴ opened his mailbox to discover the promise of sunshine packaged in a long-awaited postal delivery. The colorful East Ridge retirement brochure had finally arrived. Like many of his friends, Arthur and his wife Helen had their hearts set on selling the old family home and migrating to Florida. They dreamed about warm winter evenings, long afternoon golf and card games at the country club, and lazy Saturdays sunbathing by the pool. After nearly fifty years as a steel plant engineer, Arthur was as meticulous about researching his retirement as he was about ensuring the performance of his factory's machinery: he kept a running tally of household expenses, estimating what it might cost to make this dream a reality; a precariously high pile of library books and brochures about Florida, as well as newspaper clippings offering the latest advice on the benefits and pitfalls of retirement, wobbled on his bedside table; and he regularly sent away for additional information.

Each week the postman delivered another leaflet advertising life in the “Sunshine State,” but Arthur had been waiting for this particular brochure for some time. Constructed in

14. Arthur Steed is described by a 1963 *Miami News* article as a retired steel plant engineer who is happily living with his wife Helen in Miami's East Ridge Retirement Community. See: George Newman, “They Call it Retirement Village,” *Miami News*, June 16, 1963. In this chapter the author imagines how the Steeds might have come to their decision to move to East Ridge.

1962, East Ridge was a new retirement community, owned and operated in Miami, Florida by the Senior Citizen's Foundation, a non-profit organization of the Lutheran Church.¹⁵ The Steed's church had been abuzz with gossip about this facility ever since a number of their members traveled south for its dedication. Kicking off his wet boots, Arthur called to his wife. "Plan your retirement the modern way," he read, "Inspect your future by visiting East Ridge. Nestled in the lovely Whispering Pines area of South Dade, on the coastal ridge near Biscayne Bay, East Ridge is ideally situated with respect to climate, location, and opportunities for active carefree living." A short drive from downtown Miami, East Ridge promised convenience to the many attractions that made southern Florida a retiree's paradise, including championship golf courses, beautiful beaches, impressive museums, and fine restaurants. "Here you will find no old folks' home atmosphere," boasted the community director. Retirement at East Ridge is thoroughly "modern." The pamphlet went on to describe a multi-million dollar facility situated on lushly landscaped grounds where residents participated in lawn bowling, barbecue parties, and organized excursions to the city.¹⁶

East Ridge's impressive literature, like the numerous brochures crowding the Steed's bedside table, catered to a new kind of aging American. Never before had older people comprised such a substantial and growing proportion of the U.S. Population. Never before had the government, private organizations, and corporations focused so much attention on older Americans as a unique group of citizens and consumers. Never before had so many seniors enjoyed such long and healthy lives or accumulated enough wealth to live comfortably and independently from their children. And never before had so many older

15. "Retirees' Village is Ready," *Miami News*, Nov. 3, 1962.

16. *East Ridge Retirement Village: The Beginning of a Bright, Happy, Interesting and Active New Way of Life* (Lutheran Senior Citizen Foundation, Inc, 1964), 1.

people passed the final decades of their lives in retirement, segregated from the working world and surrounded by a burgeoning subculture of seniors with past-times, interests, and challenges in common.

By mid-century, the U.S. population was growing gray right along with Helen and Arthur Steed. The percentage of Americans ages sixty-five¹⁷ and over rose from four percent at the turn of the twentieth century to 6.8, 8.1, and 9.2 percent in 1940, 1950, and 1960 respectively. The demographics are even more impressive when comparing the 2.8 percent increase in older Americans during the first four decades of the 1900s, with the 4.5 percent increase between 1940 and 1980, when the number of seniors reached 11.3 percent of the total population.¹⁸

Governmental interest in older Americans increased almost as rapidly. In 1956 President Eisenhower established the Federal Council on Aging, stating that: “The marked rise in the number of older persons in our population has a continuing and fundamental impact on our society. Scientific advances in the field of health and the increased productivity of farms and factories have brought the blessings of long life and prosperity to the American people ... [These added years should bring] health, usefulness and contentment for the individual, and a source of strength to the nation.”¹⁹ Eisenhower assigned the Council the task of reviewing federal programs in light of older citizens’ needs and asked for recommendations to help meet them.

Over the next decade, the government launched a historic number of social welfare

17. Throughout history human beings have recognized older adulthood as a distinct age group within the population. In the twentieth century, American legislators and private companies often settled on a person’s sixty-fifth birthday as an eligibility of requirement for old age programs. Chronological definitions of ‘old age’, however, remain imprecise and vary depending on the context.

18. *Aging in America: Trends and Projections* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Special Committee on Aging, 1988), 12.

19. “President Eisenhower Establishes a Federal Council on Aging,” *Aging* (May 1956), No. 23: 1-2.

programs and research studies aimed at improving the lives of seniors.²⁰ Employment opportunities, affordable housing, and health care for older adults took center stage in Washington D.C. during the first White House Conference on Aging, held in January 1961.²¹ In July, 1965 Congress passed the Medicare and Medicaid bills. An entitlement program for seniors who drew Social Security, Medicare provided beneficiaries with a hospital insurance program as well as help in defraying the costs of basic medical care.²² Medicaid, meanwhile, served as a means-based program which offered health insurance coverage to low-income individuals regardless of age, although elderly Americans soon grew to encompass a sizable proportion of recipients. During the same session, congress also passed the Older Americans' Act which created the Administration on Aging (AoA) within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) and provided federal funding for demonstration and research programs at the state and local levels.²³ Within the first six months, the government had already awarded more than half a million dollars to five states, whose AoA programs included the creation of counseling services, retirement preparation classes, senior centers, and affordable housing projects for the elderly.²⁴

Post-war seniors also benefited from the expansion and liberalization of the federal government's old-age insurance program (created in 1935 under Title II of the Social Security

20. W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 144-7; W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers: Gerontology Emerges as a Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 89-100, 187-218.

21. "Congress Votes January 1961 White House Conference," *Aging* (Sept. 1958), No. 47: 1-2, and "White House Conference on Aging, January 9-12, 1961: Plans for Big Event Past Halfway Point," *Professional Nursing Home* (Jan. 1960), Vol. 2, No. 1:8.

22. "89th Congress Enacts Record Number of Bills to Help Nation's Elderly," *Aging* (Dec. 1965) No. 134: 1, 20.

23. "Provisions of the Older Americans' Act of 1965," *Aging* (Aug. 1965), 4-5.

24. "AoA Approves First State Plans for Programs on Aging," *Aging* (Jan. 1966), 1, 16-17.

Act).²⁵ The program, which paid cash benefits to retirees, grew more inclusive throughout the 1950s and 1960s as amendments added workers previously excluded from participation, including farm and domestic workers, self-employed professionals, and military personnel.²⁶ During this same period, Congress continually granted generous benefit increases. Both liberal and moderate congressmen felt comfortable expanding entitlements because a favorable ratio of workers to retirees bolstered Social Security trust funds.²⁷ In 1972 Congress granted a whopping twenty-percent increase in entitlements and authorized automatic cost-of-living adjustments so that retirees' monthly checks would keep pace with inflation.²⁸

These and numerous other federal initiatives did not eradicate poverty among older Americans, but post-war seniors were, on the whole, far more financially secure because of them.²⁹ During the 1930s, more than half of all older Americans experienced dependency. By 1974 the proportion of seniors living in poverty had declined to 15.7 percent. There was a similar decline in the percentage of seniors struggling just above the poverty line. In 1959 low-income elders comprised 35.2 percent of the population over the age of sixty-five. By

25. This program, financed by pay-roll taxes deducted from current workers' wages, paid cash benefits to retirees. For a succinct description and history of the Social Security Act, see: Raissa Muhutdinova-Foroughi, "Social Security Act (1935)," in Carl Van Horn and Herbert Schaffner, eds., *Work in America: An Encyclopedia of History, Policy, and Society*, Vol. 2 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 498-503.

26. The numbers of beneficiaries collecting Social Security grew from roughly 220,000 in December of 1940 to over 14.8 million in December in 1961. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 144; W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray: Old Age, American Values, and Federal Policies Since 1920* (Boston: Little Brown, 1983), 62-64, 116.

27. For example, Congress increased benefits by twelve and a half percent in 1952, by thirteen percent in 1954 and 1968, by fifteen percent in 1971, and by twenty percent in 1972. Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 116.

28. *Ibid.*, 116.

29. Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 182.

1970 this number had dropped to 24.6 percent.³⁰

While the wealth of all aging Americans increased in the post-war period, it is important to note that young, white middle- and working-class retirees reaped most of the benefits. Domestic, agricultural, and casual laborers were excluded from the original Social Security Act and few participated in private pension programs. These workers, many of whom were African American, struggled all of their lives to make ends meet and entered old age with few savings and often in failing health. Affordable housing and health care services remained out of reach for many poor and minority seniors.³¹ Women also endured disproportionate hardship in later life. Women who stayed home to raise children did not participate in the social security program and were therefore dependent on their husbands' benefits. Women in the working world often labored for low wages and received smaller social security and private pension benefits than most male workers.³² Finally, retirees of all backgrounds endured physical and financial dependency during their final years of life. As growing numbers of seniors reached their eightieth birthdays and beyond, they were more likely to suffer from frailty and chronic disease. These ailments, combined with rapidly rising medical and long-term care costs, quickly depleted pension benefits and savings. Despite the advances of modern medicine, the nation's frailest citizens often faced the end of life without adequate assistance. A lack of home-based alternatives meant that many seniors and their

30. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 143-144, 150

31. Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 35-60, 179; Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 183; Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 159-60; Robert Joseph Taylor and Willie H. Taylor, "The Social and Economic Status of the Black Elderly," *Phylon* Vol. 43, No. 4 (1982), 295-306; Rose Gibson, "The Work, Retirement, and Disability of Older Black Americans," in James S. Jackson ed., *The Black American Elderly: Research on Physical and Psychological Health* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1988), 304-324; Ronald Angel and Jacquelyn Angel, *Who Will Care for Us?: Aging and Long-Term Care in Multicultural America* (NY: NY University Press, 1997), 10-11, 17, 23-24, 48-51.

32. Wilbur Cohen, "Social Security: An Intergenerational Compact," *Southern Exposure*, Vol. XIII, No. 2-3 (1985), 142; Angel and Angel, *Who Will Care for Us?*, 10, 48-51, 60.

families reluctantly turned to nursing homes. The need for dignified, cost-effective elder care remained woefully unfulfilled.³³

Still, for growing numbers of newly retired, middle- and working-class seniors like Arthur and Helen Steed, the specter of poverty and ill health probably appeared as a fleeting and distant distraction. Contemporary surveys revealed that a sizable majority of older workers looked forward to retirement. Retirement, noted mid-century gerontologist Wilma Donahue, had come to be regarded “as a period of potential enjoyment and creative experience which accrues as a social reward for a lifetime of labor.”³⁴ Historian Andrew Achenbaum observes, moreover, that “workers' actual experiences of retirement generally conformed with their sanguine expectations ... While retired workers noted that they had to be careful about their expenses, the combined income generated from Social Security, private plans, annuities, and savings, among other sources, provided enough to cover necessities and justify an occasional luxury.”³⁵

As they exited the workplace, older adults drew increasing attention from corporate America. Businesses may have remained uninterested in hiring seniors, but they did not hesitate to relieve the “nation's new leisured class” of its savings.³⁶ A 1954 *Business Week* report described marketers' rising interest in older consumers, stating that “Over the past few years, new facts ... about the needs, numbers, the incomes and the spending tendencies [of

33. Bentley Lipscomb, “The Climate of Aging,” *ACCESS* (April/May 1978), 3; *Florida Long Term Care Study, Phase II. Targeting Change: Background Papers* (1985), 4; Lipscomb, “The Climate of Aging,” 3.

34. Wilma Donahue, Harold Orbach, and Otto Pollack, “Retirement: The Emerging Social Pattern,” in Clark Tibbits, ed., *Handbook of Social Gerontology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 330-406; Quoted in Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 60.

35. Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 60-1.

36. Richard Calhoun, *In Search of the New Old: Redefining Old Age in America, 1945-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 190-216; Quote from Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 60-1.

retirees] ... have convinced business men that they have misjudged and underestimated the vigor and importance of the purchasing power of the sixty-five-and-over market.”³⁷ In order to appeal to seniors, many post-war marketers created a “new and improved” image of older Americans. Numerous campaigns tempered common and persistent stereotypes of the elderly as crotchety “old fogies” by emphasizing instead the adventures and opportunities available to vital, modern retirees. Along side the usual assortment of testimonials peddling prune juice, hair dyes, and anti-wrinkle creams, slick advertisements featured older Americans enjoying new automobiles, retirement homes, and golden anniversary vacations.³⁸

For Arthur Steed and his cohort, the comfortable and even luxurious retirements envisioned in these ads appeared well founded. Mid-century seniors were living healthier, longer lives; their growing numbers gave them an increasing social and political presence; government policies put more money in their pockets; and marketing campaigns – such as the East Ridge retirement brochure - increasingly portrayed them as a vigorous, adventurous lot. Later life should be considered nothing less than one’s “Diamond Years,” trumpeted East Ridge advertisers. “Beyond green youth ... just past the family raising and the money making part of life,” these years too had a “beauty of purpose ... and [ought to be filled with] a healthy curiosity about life which is the exact opposite of boredom.”³⁹ Arthur agreed. He wrote to East Ridge, requesting an application for admission.

Creating the Diamond Years: A Brief History of Retirement

37. “Older, Sprightlier Market,” *Business Week*, June 19, 1954. See also: “Expanding Markets: The Oldsters,” *Nation’s Business*, 45: November 1957; “How the Old Age Market Looks,” *Business Week*, Feb. 13, 1960; *Business Week*, “Never Too Old to Buy,” May 23, 1964.

38. Calhoun, *In Search of the New Old*, 192-213.

39. *East Ridge Retirement Village*, 1.

Arthur Steed considered retirement a period of well-deserved leisure after years of hard work. He had paid his dues to society as a reliable employee and family man. He had contributed to Social Security and his company's pension plan and he now expected to retire with dignity and enough savings to live comfortably in Florida. Retirement had been much less common before the mid-1900s, however. It would have held very different meanings to Steed's ancestors, at a time when economic circumstances and social mores most likely prevented them from retiring.⁴⁰

Throughout most of American history, hard work was generally expected of all family members. Necessity forced many children to earn their keep, and elderly men and women often labored until the end of their lives.⁴¹ In a culture in which labor was considered a virtue (and a necessity) and long periods of leisure uncommon, the *Saturday Review's* 1903 characterization of retirement as "an act that stimulates the forced inactivity of death," was particularly apt.⁴² For the majority of older adults who depended on labor for survival, retirement may well have represented financial failure and physical decline. Besides the poorhouse, there was little public support for needy elders until the 1930s.⁴³

Whether working their own fields or laboring outside the home, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Americans supported continued labor by the aged. Prior to the early

40. Harold Orbach, "Normative Aspects of Retirement," in Clark Tibbitts and Wilma Donahue, eds, *Social and Psychological Aspects of Aging* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1962), 53-55.

41. John Corson and John McConnell, *Economic Needs of Older People* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1956), 7-9, 11; Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 74, 89, 105, 114-115, 181; Robert Burns, "Economic Aspects of Aging and Retirement," *American Journal of Sociology* (Jan. 1954), 384; Paula Scott, *Growing Old in the Early Republic: Spiritual, Social and Economic Issues, 1790-1830* (NY: Garland Publishing Co., 1997), 146-148; Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 67.

42. Quoted in William Graebner, *A History of Retirement: Meaning and Function of an American Institution, 1885-1978* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 10.

43. Carole Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America's Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 82-84; Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 90, 141-2, 177-8.

1900s, most men engaged in family farming, an occupation which required multi-generational cooperation and support. Grown children, out of respect for their elders and in anticipation of inheriting family property, labored alongside their parents and assisted them in times of need. They worked the family land, provided financial aid, and nursed their parents through periods of poor health. Bolstered by these and other forms of assistance from children and extended kin, elderly Americans continued to work, when capable, until the day they died.⁴⁴

A similar pattern existed outside the home. Among tradespeople, senior craftsmen were respected for their experience and valued as teachers of younger workers and apprentices. Even if they wanted to, paternalism prevented most employers from laying off older workers. A worker slowed down by age was generally kept on but was sometimes demoted to a reduced workload or removed from important responsibilities. Many managers did not have the heart to retire longtime employees completely, for few workers could depend on their meager savings to support them and private and public pension systems were practically nonexistent.⁴⁵

By the early 1900s, attitudes about retirement began to change, in part because of new theories about the aging body. Once venerated as strong and noble survivors, medical and scientific studies now associated the elderly with physical and mental decline.⁴⁶ Doctor

44. Scott, 146-153; Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 89-90, 172-3.

45. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 144, 148; Graebner, *A History of Retirement*, 11, 120-121. For an analysis of nineteenth-century popular portrayals of older men's labor force participation and retirement, see: Jane Range and Maris Vinovskis, "Images of Elderly in Popular Magazines: A Content Analysis of 'Littell's Living Age', 1845-1882," *Social Science History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 1981), 137-140.

46. W. Andrew Achenbaum, "The Obsolescence of Old Age in America, 1865-1914," *Journal of Social History* (Autumn 1974), 48-52; Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 35-37. In an analysis of popular nineteenth-century short stories, Jane Range and Maris Vinovskis concluded that older people were portrayed as "remarkably healthy, sane, and economically independent." See: Range and Vinovskis, "Images of the Elderly," 156.

George Beard's popular theory of "neurasthenia" proved particularly detrimental to older workers. Beard hypothesized that individuals were born with a predetermined amount of physical and mental energy. The everyday stresses of the workplace, he argued, slowly depleted these resources, leaving older persons nervous, fatigued, and simply unfit for productive labor.⁴⁷

Changes in the workplace also spurred support for retirement. Pension plans gained popularity among diverse and often competing industrial interests. In an increasingly competitive, market-driven society, capitalists considered retirement a practical solution to a number of labor problems. Bolstered by medical beliefs about the declining abilities of older workers, some of the nation's largest corporations began offering pension plans. Employers hoped that these company-sponsored programs would promote workplace efficiency and generate worker loyalty. Employees who anticipated a financial reward for years of service would be more likely to stay on the job (at a time when labor turnover was on the increase) and less likely to participate in union activism. Private pensions also looked promising for a company's bottom line. Older, supposedly less efficient workers could now be replaced by younger, more vigorous, and also less expensive laborers.⁴⁸

Like large companies, unions also turned to pension programs and for many of the same reasons. Labor leaders hoped to inspire membership loyalty. Pensions, they surmised, would encourage workers' identification with the union rather than with the companies that employed them. Pension programs also appeared promising for younger workers, especially

47. Thomas Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 162-169; Graebner, *A History of Retirement*, 29-31. Also see I.L. Nascher's theories about the aging mind and body: Achenbaum, "The Obsolescence of Old Age," 54-55; Cole, *The Journey of Life*, 202-207. For a detailed history of the emergence of old age as a scientific and medical "problem" during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see: Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers*, 1-117; Cole, *The Journey of Life*, 212-226.

48. Graebner, *A History of Retirement*, 127-129; Achenbaum, "The Obsolescence of Old Age," 55-56.

those in declining industries. The removal of older union employees from the workplace increased job opportunities and promotions for less experienced laborers. Finally, union leaders hoped that their retirement plans would stimulate more fruitful activism. Younger members could now go out on strike without worrying about the older workers often left behind on the shop floor.⁴⁹

In the mid-1800s, public workers, like their private-sector counterparts, continued to labor at a ripe old age. Only state judges faced mandatory, age-based retirement. But by the early twentieth century, government officials were similarly influenced by medical descriptions of age-related decline and concerned about its impact on worker efficiency. Public school teachers, letter carriers, and postal clerks were among the first government workers to face superannuation. Although state-employed teachers received pensions, for a long while federal employees were retired without any form of financial assistance. Legislation in 1920 finally provided federal civil servants with pension benefits.⁵⁰

Government officials, union leaders, and capitalists created retirement programs for their own ends, but popular demand also fueled their growth. Demographic changes, combined with new ideas about the proper role of families, increased Americans' interest in pension programs. Smaller twentieth century families provided fewer offspring to assist aged parents. At the same time, popular advice literature touted the virtues of the nuclear family. Social critics urged parents to invest more resources in raising and educating their children. They argued that three-generation households hampered these efforts because elder care was costly and time consuming. For these reasons, families increasingly turned to state

49. Ibid., 28-31, 135-138.

50. Ibid., 10-11, 57-58, 72-73, 96-97.

and private pension programs to help support their eldest members.⁵¹

Despite these developments, early pension programs met the needs of comparatively few older Americans. Payments were often paltry and served only a small percentage of workers. As late as 1932, most employees were not covered by pensions. Union plans generally served skilled workers such as carpenters, printers, machinists, and railway employees, rather than the masses of unskilled laborers. And although a growing number of companies offered retirement programs, such plans often required more than fifteen years service, did not provide support for spouses, and were funded entirely by worker contributions. Most companies were not even legally bound to fulfill their promises of pension provision – making retirement, at best, an unreliable benefit.⁵²

With the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935, the federal government finally responded to the obvious needs of older workers and retirees in the United States. Historians have generally described this legislation as a groundbreaking form of welfare policy. Indeed, the Social Security Act and other measures adopted during the Great Depression heralded a new era of state responsibility for public well-being.⁵³ Scholars have also maintained, however, that the Social Security Act had as much to do with age discrimination and economic considerations as it did with the relief of senior citizens. Historian William Graebner argues that with the provision of dependable income to retired workers, President Roosevelt's administration wanted to encourage older employees to leave their jobs and step aside for the benefit of younger workers. The program also promised to keep social upheaval

51. Brian Gratton, "The Creation of Retirement: Families, Individuals, and the Social Security Movement," in K. Warner and W. Andrew Achenbaum, eds., *Societal Impact on Aging: Historical Perspectives* (NY: Springer Publishing Co., 1993), 59-62.

52. Graebner, *A History of Retirement*, 133.

53. Paul Douglas, *Social Security in the United States* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1939), 6.

in check by creating opportunities for America's "restless" and unemployed youth, who might otherwise turn to crime and violence. Finally, the Roosevelt administration expected Social Security payments to stimulate the economy by encouraging consumption. The government reasoned that retirees with money in their pockets would spend it.⁵⁴

Social security, collective-bargaining agreements that featured pensions, and federal legislation which provided tax incentives to companies with pension programs all spurred the rapid growth of retirement.⁵⁵ In 1900 thirty-two percent of all men over the age of sixty-five were retired from the workforce. This proportion climbed to fifty-five percent by 1950 and raced to upwards of seventy percent just one decade later.⁵⁶ "Being over sixty clearly has diminished the likelihood since World War I that older men and women will gain employment or remain in the labor market," noted Andrew Achenbaum in his 1978 history of old age in America. "This ... remains true whether one controls for race or place of birth, and it is valid at the regional as well as the national level. In fact, the elderly's employment record in nearly every occupational category also corroborates this conclusion."⁵⁷

By mid-century mass retirement was not only possible, it was a major cultural phenomenon. Governmental and social organizations, businesses and professionals of all kinds catered to the needs of growing numbers of retirees. Golden Age Clubs, founded in the 1940s, The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), founded in 1955, its publication, *Modern Maturity*, the journals *Harvest Years* and *Retirement Planning News*, along with scores of books on retirement planning all promised retirees service and guidance

54. Graebner, *A History of Retirement*, 180-190, 98-199; Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five*, 129.

55. In 1940 3.7 million workers were covered by private pension plans. By 1959 this number had multiplied to 19 million, or 28.5 percent of the civilian workforce. Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 60.

56. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 95; Burns, "Economic Aspects of Aging and Retirement," 385.

57. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 95.

in navigating this new frontier.⁵⁸ Growing older was a challenge “but no one need attempt it alone,” concluded one advice book. “Thousands of experts are devoting all their time to making the later years better, healthier, happier. Countless public and private agencies are expending millions on study and research. Jobs and educational opportunities for the retiree are being created; books and clinics are available, special cities are being built, special housing, special homes, special foods are being created. The retiree is the object of one of the greatest improvement efforts ever undertaken in this country.”⁵⁹

The Retirement Handbook: Advice on Aging from Mid-Century Experts

In her study of American family life during the Cold War, historian Elaine Tyler May dubs the postwar years the “era of the expert.” Pointing to best selling books such as Benjamin Spock’s *Baby and Child Care* and Norman Vincent Peale’s *The Power of Positive Thinking*, May demonstrates the popularity of advice literature among young men and women.⁶⁰ “The wisdom of earlier generations would be of little help to post-war Americans who were looking toward a radically new vision of family life and trying self-consciously to avoid the paths of their parents” states May. “Thus, young people embraced the advice of experts in the rapidly expanding fields of social science, medicine, and psychology.”⁶¹

While young couples relied on Dr. Spock’s advice about raising healthy children, their parents turned to experts of their own. Young adults may have perceived their parents’

58. Graebner, 231, 235, 240-241.

59. Year Round Publishing, *Everything You Need to Know About Retiring to Florida*, (Fort Lauderdale: Year Round Publishers, 1966), 60.

60. Benjamin Spock, *Baby and Child Care* (NY: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1957). Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (NY: Prentice Hall, 1952). Peale’s book was on America’s best-seller list for the full first year after its publication.

61. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1988), 26-27.

generation as stereotypically “stuck in the past,” but older Americans were in fact involved in a dramatic social transformation of later life. The growth of mass retirement fermented nothing less than a cultural revolution in the ways in which older people organized their lives. By the mid-1950s, this retirement revolution received increasing attention from academics and pop-psychologists alike. In January 1954, *The American Journal of Sociology* devoted an entire volume to the study of retirement, which sociologist Clark Tibbitts described as a “new phenomenon in our society and the challenge of a new way of life for most Americans.” The “product of scientific invention and discovery,” Tibbitts argued, retirement resulted in “changing social roles and in the extension of life beyond the completion of conventional adult responsibilities.”⁶² Experts such as Tibbitts eagerly assisted older Americans in making sense of their new horizons and in dealing with the numerous adjustments that would necessarily take place along the way. Changing social roles and prolonged life, after all, created an assortment of problems. Successful retirees, the experts noted, would have to develop friendships and interests outside of the working world, create new and useful positions within their families and communities, and learn to balance a budget on a reduced income.⁶³

In preparing to meet such challenges, prospective retirees such as Arthur and Helen Steed may well have turned to any one of the numerous publications aimed at helping older Americans sort out their options. In addition to the American Association of Retired Person's *Modern Maturity* magazine, popular works included the Public Affairs Committee pamphlet, *Getting Ready To Retire* by Kathryn Close (1952), Joseph Buckley's *Retirement Handbook*:

62. Clark Tibbitts, “Retirement Problems in American Society,” *American Journal of Sociology* (January 1954), 301.

63. Tibbitts, “Retirement Problems,” 303-304.

A Complete Planning Guide to Your Future (1953), Eugene Friedmann's *Retirement: A New Way of Life* (1956), Mollie Hart's *When Your Husband Retires* (1960), and P. D. Gathright's *Modern Maturity: Its Quest for Love, Respect and Happiness* (1962).⁶⁴

Whether instructing older Americans on making the most of their marriages, budgets, or free time, these authors stressed the importance of personal responsibility and preparedness. Despite the growth of post-war governmental and industrial support systems for the elderly (private pensions, Social Security, and other governmental outreach programs), few authors advised retirees about seeking outside assistance. Gathright's preface solemnly informed retirees that they were "responsible for their plights, whether tolerable or seemingly intolerable."⁶⁵ Buckley suggested, "Your success and happiness in retirement, as in any period of life, depends on the effort, knowledge and common sense you bring into play."⁶⁶ Personal responsibility took precedence even in Close's Public Affairs Pamphlet – the very place one might expect to find information about governmental programs. Close warned older Americans that "the stark reality of later life is that nobody can be relied upon completely to bring you the kind of comfort and attention you may think you will need."⁶⁷

Cultivating a positive outlook went hand in hand with personal responsibility. Much

64. Joseph C. Buckley, *The Retirement Handbook: A Complete Planning Guide to Your Future* (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1953); Kathryn Close, *Getting Ready to Retire, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 182* (NY: Public Affairs Committee, 1952); Eugene Friedmann, *Retirement, A New Way of Life: A Guide to the Later Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956); P.D. Gathright, *Modern Maturity: Its Quest for Love, Respect, and Happiness* (NY: Carlton Press, 1962); Mollie Hart, *When Your Husband Retires* (NY, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960). Additional examples of post-war retirement advice literature include: Ralph Beatty, *The Senior Citizen* (Springfield, IL: C. C. Thomas, 1962); Paul Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire* (NY: Harper, 1952); Beulah Collins, *The Senior Forum, Questions and Answers About Retirement* (NY: Fleet Pub Corp, 1964); Harry Walker Hepner, *Retirement – A Time to Live Anew: A Practical Guide to Managing Your Retirement* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1969); Raymond Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It* (NY: Association Press, 1942). Retirees also turned to *Modern Maturity*, a monthly publication by the American Association of Retired Persons.

65. Gathright, *Modern Maturity*, v.

66. Buckley, *The Retirement Handbook*, 1.

67. Close, *Getting Ready to Retire*, 13.

mid-century retirement literature could be counted among the rash of fiercely popular self-help books which preached, in the Peale tradition, that faith and an optimistic outlook could improve almost any situation. Authors advised that “real happiness in the later years can come only if you have within yourself the proper attitudes.”⁶⁸ “Happiness,” they stressed, “takes effort... It has to be earned.”⁶⁹ The experts encouraged retirees to practice patience, moderation, optimism and good will, especially when faced with life’s challenges.⁷⁰

A positive outlook proved particularly important for the wives of newly retired men. Hart’s book, *When Your Husband Retires*, cataloged the many changes concerned wives might encounter when former breadwinners adjusted to daily life outside of the workforce. Hart’s was one of the few retirement books addressed directly to women and even her advice was tailored to housewives, not female retirees. Authors paid little attention to the ways in which workingwomen dealt with their own retirement. Despite the fact that growing numbers of older women worked outside of the home – by 1950 there were five-and-a-half-million female workers over the age of forty-five⁷¹ -- experts labeled retirement a “man’s problem.” Most agreed that work and family life held different meanings for men and women. Men, they argued, defined themselves by the professions and trades they pursued. Women, meanwhile, found identity and self-esteem within the fabric of friendships and family life. Employment did not shape the female character, explained psychologists Elaine Cumming and William Henry. They reasoned, therefore, that “retirement is not an important problem

68. Friedmann, *Retirement*, 23.

69. Gathright, *Modern Maturity* 59.

70. Friedmann, *Retirement*, 22-23; Gathright, *Modern Maturity*, 59, 65-68; Close, *Getting Ready to Retire*, 22-23.

71. William Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 161-162.

for women ... It is as though they add work to their lives the way they add club membership ... Working seems an activity to augment the income and fill up time; it does not express the whole woman.”⁷²

Women needed to provide emotional support for their partners from paycheck to pension, however, and the changing nature of married life was one aspect of retirement that required the careful attention of wives as well as husbands. Marriage after retirement, “is a new kind of life,” explained Hart, “quite different in many ways from a life which brought the husband home only on nights and weekends.”⁷³ Hart addressed the adjustments necessary when retired husbands and wives spent more time together. Like newlyweds, retired spouses often took time getting used to one another’s “little personal habits.” In order to better appreciate each other, Hart advised older couples to schedule time apart.⁷⁴ Relationships faced particular strain when retired husbands spent too much time moping about at home. Leaving little room for pity, Hart asked her readers to “pardon my severity,” but, “it’s the man’s own fault. He never prepared himself for retired life.”⁷⁵ The author instructed wives to take responsibility over this difficult situation. Use your “wisdom and wiles” to engage your husband in constructive interests, Hart advised. “If a husband is sufficiently absorbed in his own ... pursuits he doesn’t feel that his wife has to be on hand all the time to keep him company.”⁷⁶

Hart also highlighted the frustration wives felt when husbands encroached on

72. Elaine Cumming and William Henry, *Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement* (NY: Basic Books, 1961), 144-145.

73. Hart, *When Your Husband Retires*, ix-x.

74. *Ibid.*, 139, 143.

75. *Ibid.*, 122.

76. *Ibid.*, 123-124.

household duties. An over-zealous commitment to the efficiency model of the working world will have your husband convinced that “he can show you how to do the housework in just half the time,” she cautioned. Suggesting that such assistance was about “as devastating a thing to have in the home as a whirling dervish,” the author advised dethroned housewives to calmly but firmly inform their mates that they had long managed the home without any help and they preferred it that way.⁷⁷ Of course, a husband's idle hands could also cause trouble. Hart noted that elderly housewives often felt resentful of their spouses' free time. After all, housewives worked equally as hard their husbands. They spent years raising children and running an economical household. Hart called for compassion and compromise. Any husband, she concluded, “if he is a good egg,” will help out around the house at his wife’s discretion, providing her with “some degree of retirement, too.”⁷⁸

Financial worries also strained marriage in later life. Of key concern to Hart - and to most every expert - was the fact that retired couples had to make do on dramatically reduced incomes.⁷⁹ The prospect of “getting by” might chill even the warmest wife against the idea of her husband’s retirement, suggested Hart. “What’s so glorious about driving an old car, making last year’s dresses do, and giving up that luscious vacation when for two wonderful weeks she didn’t even have to put her head into a kitchen or compare the cost of broccoli vs.

carrots?”⁸⁰ In order to avoid undue hardship, Hart advised wives to plan ahead by creating a

77. Ibid., 6-16.

78. Ibid., 30-31. Other post-war authors have also touched on the changing nature of marriage after retirement. For additional examples, see: Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 5 and Gathright, *Modern Maturity*, 102.

79. According to sociologist Robert Burns, the median income of employed men aged fifty-five to sixty in 1951 was \$2,840 compared to \$1,008 for retired men aged 65. This represented a sixty-four percent decline in income and fell short of the \$1700-\$1800 a year budget proposed in 1950 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to meet the basic needs of a retired elderly couple. See: Burns, “Economic Aspects of Aging and Retirement,” 386, 389; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Economic Status of Older Men and Women* (1953).

80. Hart, *When Your Husband Retires*, 25-26.

budget with their husbands well in advance of retirement. “After all,” she cautioned, “once a man has retired it’s just about impossible for him to get unretired [sic] again.”⁸¹

Other authors provided a more positive outlook on making ends meet in retirement. They encouraged nervous readers by reminding them that as a retiree's income declined, so too did his cost of living. Retired men no longer required expensive working attire. As children left the nest, there were fewer mouths to feed and fewer needs to meet. Besides, the sensible retiree had already squirreled away sizable savings and social security benefits were tax-free. When budgets were tight, these authors advise retirees to maintain a positive outlook by considering penny-pinching something of a noble challenge.⁸²

Nearly every issue of *Modern Maturity* included tips for stretching the retirement dollar. But if all else failed, the crafty retiree could always earn extra income by starting his own small business. Numerous retirement books offered suggestions about operating successful retail, mail order, and real estate businesses, to name but a few.⁸³ Most authors portrayed the retiree’s business prospects in a positive light. In addition to supplementing family income, Joseph Buckley concluded that the successful small business stimulated a retiree’s sense of self worth. Rather than sitting at home bored and alone, the “retired” business owner led an active life and made a positive contribution to his community.⁸⁴ P.D. Gathright felt less confident about the ability of the average retiree to secure a successful small business, or even a promising part time position. “One must realize that jobs open to old people are not choice and the salary will be smaller, so one had better learn not to be

81. Ibid., 22-23.

82. Friedmann, *Retirement*, 4-7.

83. For two examples see: Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 105-145; Close, *Getting Ready to Retire*, 5-9.

84. Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 105.

fussy,” he warned. “If having a job is of primary importance, a retiree should take any job available and do his best to fill it.”⁸⁵

Gathright and Buckley both agreed, however, that retirees -- whether employed or not -- reaped substantial benefits by remaining active. Gathright argued that retirees too often made the mistake of withdrawing from social activities. Lethargy leads only to boredom and bossiness, he warned. Inactive retirees become “as cross as sore-tail bears, which adds to their woes and misery.”⁸⁶ “Just sitting around in a rocking chair without anything to do means being thrown on the scrap pile,” echoed Buckley.⁸⁷ Most experts concurred. They advised retirees to participate in their communities by attending church, volunteering to help the less fortunate, and participating in social clubs.⁸⁸

In their much debated book, *Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement*, psychologists Elaine Cumming and William Henry challenged the notion that active retirees were happier and healthier than their more reclusive counterparts. The authors argued that modern society's denial of death created the flawed conclusion that the successful senior ought to behave “as much like a middle-aged person as possible.”⁸⁹ Cumming and Hart described such efforts as “much swimming against the stream to overcome the natural tendency for the world around him to withdraw its support.”⁹⁰ This withdrawal was mutually advantageous, they concluded, because it allowed elderly men and women to prepare for

85. Gaithright, *Modern Maturity*, 103.

86. *Ibid.*, 22.

87. Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 3.

88. See, for example: Gaithright, 82-87, 145-150; Close, *Getting Ready to Retire*, 12-18; Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 74-95.

89. Cumming and Henry, *Growing Old*, 18.

90. *Ibid.*, 22.

death by slowly divesting themselves of life's entanglements, while the rest of society learned to function without them. These various stages of this withdrawal, or "disengagement," they argued, included retirement, the relinquishment of social roles and participation in outer world, a growing inward focus, and ultimately death.⁹¹

Whether retirement stimulated older Americans' participation in new activities and hobbies or spelled a gradual disengagement from society, few mid-century experts challenged the idea of retirement itself. Again and again, they described this withdrawal from the labor force as a foregone conclusion – the inevitable result of modernization as America grew from an agricultural society into an industrial power house.⁹² "Fundamentally, [retirement] is an outgrowth of the scientific and technological achievements of our time," concluded sociologist Clark Tibbitts.⁹³

Millions of older people withdrew from the workplace, but they did not leave the American marketplace behind. In fact, their departure from the working world created a veritable gold-mine for burgeoning industries that came to view elder customers as anything but "disengaged." Just as the authors, publishers, and suppliers of retirement advice books profited from a growing senior market, so too did an ever expanding range of entrepreneurs. Insurance and travel agents, hotel and resort owners, builders and real estate agents soon clamored to fulfill older Americans' new need for leisure-time activities as well retirement housing and services. Many of these profiteers set their sights on Florida which was quickly emerging as a world-renowned retirement destination.

91. Ibid., 22.

92. Gathright, *Modern Maturity*, 11; Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 2-3; Tibbitts, "Retirement Problems," 301; Burns, "Economic Aspects of Aging and Retirement," 384; Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 62.

93. Tibbitts, "Retirement Problems," 301.

Resurrecting the Boulevard: Charles Lavin and Miami's New Retirement Industry

Sunshine baked the palm-studded patio and sparkled across the cool blue water of the hotel's lap pool, enticing guests like Minnie Stein out from under their cabanas. Sitting on the edge, her feet dangling in the water, Minnie enjoyed the view. Three acres of private lawns and gardens bordered Miami Beach's gleaming white, seven-story Boulevard hotel. Just beyond the grounds, Bay Shore golf links and streets lined with grand old houses lent an air of sophistication to the surroundings. After soaking up the sun, Minnie could wander into town to enjoy the air-conditioned comfort of Burdine's department store. Later that evening, she might decide to take in a show. A short stroll to Lincoln Road's celebrated theater district laid entertainment at her feet.⁹⁴

Back in his office, Charles Lavin sorted through stacks of letters. Following its feature in January's issue of *Reader's Digest*, the Boulevard received upwards of 150 letters a day.⁹⁵ Readers from across the country, but particularly the Northeast, clamored to secure a room at the newly renovated hotel. This had not always been the case. Until recently flocks of winter tourists bypassed the Boulevard and neighboring South Beach hotels in favor of new, oceanfront strips uptown. When Lavin purchased the run-down Boulevard for \$340,000 in 1954 – a price that many considered exorbitant -- paint peeled from the ceiling and towering pillars in the once magnificent lobby and weeds engulfed the long forgotten gardens. Since then, Lavin had reaped a small fortune thanks to his business savvy and a remarkable vision.⁹⁶

94. Barton Hickman, "Luxury Hotels Converted For Budget Living Cater To Sun-Seeking Oldsters," *Miami Herald Fun in Florida Magazine* (April 1, 1956), 5. In the article, Minnie Stein is photographed poolside at the Boulevard. Description of the hotel based on the 1962 brochure: "Boulevard Hotel: Plan for Happy Living."

95. William S. Dutton, "How to Retire on \$20 a Week," *Readers Digest* (Jan 1956), 26-30.

96. George and Jane Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida* (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 236-240.

Lounging in a black polka dot swimsuit, Minnie was not a bathing beauty of yesteryear, one of the voluptuous starlets who used to frequent the Boulevard – as her weathered face and sturdy frame revealed. Nor was she an important matron of means, a member of New England’s high society enjoying a winter holiday. A penny-pinching retiree on a fixed income, Minnie was, however, exactly the sort of patron Lavin had in mind when he developed his first “retirement hotel” in 1948.⁹⁷ Purchasing distressed hotels at bargain prices, Lavin reasoned that he could make a neat profit while at the same time providing seniors with comfortable and economical accommodation. Retirees had modest incomes, but pensions were dependable; and by accepting only year-round guests, Lavin insured a brisk business, even off-season. Best of all, guests like Minnie Stein proved responsible and easy to please. “I’ve got the best tenants any hotel owner could want,” Lavin declared in the *Miami Beach Reporter*. “I haven’t got any drinking problem or cigarette burns on the linens that you’d get with irresponsible people. That’s the advantage of having mature men and women as guests.”⁹⁸ Boulevard residents also participated in an innovative “share the work” scheme. Unlike pampered patrons of pricier resorts, these guests made their beds, kept their rooms tidy, and helped out around the hotel, eliminating the need for expensive labor. The Boulevard survived on a bare bone staff of just two cooks and two maintenance men.⁹⁹

By the mid-1950s, Lavin owned a chain of retirement hotels in Philadelphia and Miami, and business was booming.¹⁰⁰ Other prospectors followed suit. In addition to the Boulevard, retirees to Miami Beach now occupied rooms at the Fleetwood, Floridian,

97. Dutton, “How to Retire,” 29-30.

98. Hickman, “Luxury Hotels,” 5.

99. Dutton, “How to Retire,” 30 and Hickman, “Luxury Hotels,” 5.

100. In addition to the Boulevard, Charles Lavin’s retirement hotels included: Riddle Manor in suburban Philadelphia, the Brookwood in Media, Pennsylvania, the Monterey in Miami Beach. See Dutton, 26-28.

Blackstone, Hellene, and Monterey. The hotels soon caught the imagination of the local press, which marveled at the lucrative potential of these “old age gold mines.” “With a total outlay of \$200,000 a year in operating expenses, a retirement hotel owner can make a net profit of \$40,000 by housing and feeding guests who pay an average of \$115 to \$140 a month,” mused the *Miami Beach Reporter*.¹⁰¹

A steady stream of gray-haired guests kept entrepreneurs on their toes. The state’s sixty-five plus population increased rapidly during the second half of the twentieth century, comprising 6.9 percent of Florida residents in 1940 (barely more than the 6.8 percent of the U.S. population), 8.5 percent in 1950, 11.2 percent in 1960, and 14.5 percent in 1970 (the highest percentage in the U.S. and well over the national average of 9.9 percent).¹⁰² After the Second World War migration to Florida made up an increasing percentage of this older population. In 1940, retired migrants accounted for twenty-five percent of the state’s elderly citizens. By 1950 that number had grown to forty percent.¹⁰³

Dade County could not claim the highest percentage of older Floridians, but it was home to the state’s largest number of senior citizens, with 37,755 residents aged sixty-five or over in 1950 and 172,717 two decades later.¹⁰⁴ By January 1956, seniors settled in Dade

101. Burt Garnett, “Inside Miami Beach Retirement Hotels: An Old Age Gold Mine – Untapped,” *Miami News*, Feb. 22, 1961.

102. Jame F. Burns, “Patterns and Characteristics of Migration into Florida” in Carter C. Osterbind, ed, *Migration, Mobility and Aging* (Gainesville: University Presses of FL, 1974), 73-74; T. Stanton Dietrich, *Florida’s Older Population: Research Report No. 2* (Tallahassee: Retirement Research Division, Florida State Improvement Commission, 1952), 12. Manning J. Dauer, “Florida Growth, the Need for Regional Planning,” in Osterbind, ed, *Migration, Mobility and Aging*, 97. Carter C. Osterbind and Angela M. O’Rand, eds., *Older People in Florida: A Statistical Abstract* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1979), 3.

103. E.O. Rolland, *Facts About Florida’s Older Population* (Tallahassee: Retirement Research Division, Florida State Improvement Commission, 1953), 97. Dietrich, 21.

104. In 1951 Pinellas County had the second highest number of elderly residents, with 29, 936 citizens aged sixty-five and over, followed by Hillsborough County with 20, 127. Census counts show that Dade County continued to have the largest numbers of Florida seniors in 1960, 1970, and 1977. See Rolland, 23-24 and Osterbind, 5.

County at a record rate of 43.3 a week – a “favorable trend” in the eyes of William Weaver, district manager of the Social Security office in Miami. Weaver pointed out that these newcomers received \$1,849,00 a year in Social Security benefits – money that was “earned elsewhere but received and spent here.”¹⁰⁵

Graying America’s growing Social Security and pension benefits received significant press coverage throughout the post-war years and enterprising Miamians soon associated senior migrants with dollar signs. “There are about eight-million US citizens in the over-sixty-five bracket who are drawing social security,” the *Miami Beach Reporter* advised businessmen in 1961. “This year they will receive payments totaling about eight-billion dollars. That, plus annuities, veteran benefits, industrial pensions and income from investments, represent a huge new reservoir of cash.”¹⁰⁶ In 1956, *The Metropolitan Miamian* - a publication of Dade County’s Chamber of Commerce - explained that older adults comprised Florida’s most rapidly increasing population group and that their pension benefits were “the fastest-growing single element” in the state’s economy. “[These facts are] of vital social and economic interest,” the article concluded, “[and] point the way to expanding opportunities in a variety of trade, service, development and manufacturing fields.”¹⁰⁷ Three years later the magazine announced that Social Security payments had reached a record high of \$54,773,364 a year in Dade County, income that helped “business and the community generally because most of the money is spent immediately on food, clothing, and other necessities.”¹⁰⁸

105. “39,000 In Dade Get Age Pensions,” *Miami Daily News*, Jan. 11, 1956.

106. Garnett, “Inside Miami Beach Retirement Hotels.”

107. “Publication Tells Impact of Rising Old Age Benefits,” *The Metropolitan Miamian*, Aug. 1956. Additional articles include: “Monthly Social Security Here Tops \$4.5 Million,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, Jan. 22, 1970.

108. “Social Security Payments Reach New High in Dade,” *The Metropolitan Miamian*, Nov. 1959. See also:

By the late 1950s, the daily arrival of hundreds of retirees to the state left Florida Development Committee chairman, Sam Dell Jr. worried about the adequate provision of such necessities. “We don’t want ... [newcomers to] have to sleep on billiard tables at \$7 a night,”¹⁰⁹ he exclaimed in a *New York Times* article on retiree migration. In fact, flocks of retirees made do by living in trailer camps and on boats until they could secure permanent housing. Try as he might, Charles Lavin couldn’t hope to furnish every retiree with a room at the Boulevard. Nor did the low-cost, communal-style retirement hotel appeal to all seniors. Many preferred to spend their savings on homes of their own. Retirees waited anxiously to settle into one of Miami’s new, ultra-modern housing developments advertised in Northern newspapers as providing a “carefree” and “subtropical” way of life.¹¹⁰ Set in carefully tended communities that featured golf courses, swimming pools, and fishing piers, these one- and two-bedroom cinder-block homes catered to the retiree market, though they were not always advertised that way. As Thomas Ferris, vice president of the Florida-based Mackie building company noted, “...pensioners get mad as hell if we treat them as old people.”¹¹¹

Whether or not they claimed the title of senior citizen, retirees -- once ignored as

“Monthly Social Security Here Tops \$4.5 Million,” *Miami Reporter*, Jan. 22, 1970.

109. Merrill Folsom, “More and More Northerners Are Finding Florida the Answer for the Twilight Years,” *New York Times* March 10, 1957.

110. Folsom, “More and More Northerners.”

111. Folsom, “More and More Northerners.” Ferris elaborates on this view point in Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, page 222, arguing: “[The older buyer] does not want to be classified as a ‘retired man,’ Actually, he resents it. As a result of our findings along these lines we no longer advertise that the house is built for a retired man and has such things as grip bars in the bathtubs and eye-level shelves and appliances to aid him in his living. Those who do advertise these things are telling the man that he is becoming decrepit. We, of course, put in grip bars and eye-level appliances but we do not advertise the fact. Our people know only that the house is comfortable, that it can be cleaned in a half hour and that the 75-by-100 foot minimum piece of land which is included in the cost quoted in the brochures is just the right kind of land that a man needs to raise a little garden but which will not break his back in keeping it in shape.” For a similar perspective on down-playing retirement housing as senior housing, see American Plywood Association, *Builder’s Guide to the Retirement Home Market: A Cyclopedia of Market Facts, Buyer Preferences, Design Features and Community Planning, Financing, Construction, and Merchandising Ideas* (American Plywood Association, 1961), section v, 1-4.

conservative, reluctant buyers -- now received special attention from the housing industry which deemed the sixty-plus market as potentially lucrative as the post-war boom in veterans' housing. The 1961 *Builders' Guide to the Retirement Home Market* -- written specifically for land developers, builders, and realtors -- reminded readers that "today's oldsters are considerably different than their counterparts of twenty or even ten years ago -- particularly in regard to their attitude toward housing. They are more active and vigorous, and are becoming accustomed to the idea of changing houses as requirements change. Almost all surveys among the elderly reveal the same basic fact: suitable retirement housing is not available in most communities, but if it were, the elderly would buy it."¹¹²

In addition to offering a sizable and enthusiastic market, the *Builder's Guide* listed the many other advantages of selling property to seniors. Older consumers were excellent credit risks and they generally made larger down payments than their younger counterparts. Retirees also provided a recession-proof market. Annuities, after all, were less vulnerable than wages and salaries to fluctuations in the economy.¹¹³ For all of these reasons, older Americans looked like a promising bet and retirement homes and subdivisions soon sprouted up across the country. "Builders are just beginning to tap the potential of the industry's fastest growing market -- housing for the elderly," concluded a 1960 article in *American Builder*. "They are discovering two things: practically insatiable demand, and a market that's virtually in their own backyard."¹¹⁴

Nowhere was such a statement truer than in Florida, which led the way in the newly emerging vacation and retirement housing industry. The state offered developers a number of

112. American Plywood Association, *Builder's Guide*, section 1, 1.

113. *Ibid.*, 4.

114. *American Builder*, May 1960.

advantages, including large tracts of available land, a reputation as a resort destination, and favorable tax laws.¹¹⁵ By the late 1950s and early 1960s a number of firms mass-marketed homes in sunny subdivisions to Florida seniors, as well as to those from colder climes.¹¹⁶ One of the earliest and largest of these operations was the aforementioned Mackie Company. In 1938 the company ran an ad in *American* magazine asking older men if they would consider migrating after retirement, and if so, which location they found most appealing. More than 28,000 readers responded, the majority listing Florida as an ideal spot. By the late 1950s, the company's retirement communities dotted highways along Florida's Atlantic and Gulf coasts. "We now have more than 6,000 retired persons living in Mackie-built homes and Mackie-planned communities," boasted company executive Thomas Ferris. "We do no speculative building. Each buyer selects the type of home from a model. Ninety days from the time he makes his deposit, if his credit is right, we deliver the home to him ready to move in."¹¹⁷ Mackie and other builders often marketed such properties through the mail on an installment scheme. This way, retirees might be persuaded to purchase property site unseen, packing up their cars and motor homes, and heading south long after the developers had cashed their checks.¹¹⁸ These retirees arrived to find the building business booming in Florida, especially up and down the state's Gold Coast, as packs of hungry investors dredged and filled Florida's swampland, leaving subdivisions as large as 92,000 acres in their wake.¹¹⁹

115. James A. Peterson, *A Time For Work, A Time for Leisure: A Study of Retirement Community In-Movers* (L.A.: University of Southern California, 1960), 13.

116. Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 220-235.

117. Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 222.

118. Hubert Stroud, *The Promise of Paradise: Recreational and Retirement Communities in the United States Since 1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3.

119. Folsom, "More and More Northerners"; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 188-192.

By the early 1970s the vacation and retirement home industry earned more than five-billion-dollars a year nation-wide. Dade County's market accounted for a large portion of this success.¹²⁰ In 1975 seniors aged sixty-five and over comprised 13.6 percent of the local population and contributed more than \$350,000,000 in Social Security and private, governmental, and military pensions to Greater Miami.¹²¹ "I am very bullish on this state," declared businessman C. William Cox in a 1973 *U.S. News and World Report* article on Miami's unbridled growth. "There are more people getting bigger Social Security checks and pensions, and they will continue to come down here."¹²² Like Cox, James Vensel, senior vice president of Miami-based Deltona Corporation, credited his business's success to the "new retirement industry – the biggest in the country." The seemingly endless stream of retirees, vacationers, and businessmen to South Florida kept Deltona and a host of other developers busy. Brand new communities complete with houses and apartments, shopping centers and medical facilities sprouted up on the margins of metropolitan Miami, whose population and land prices were bursting at the seams.¹²³

'As Close to Heaven as One Can Get': Selling the Sunshine State to Seniors

Although their numbers increased exponentially, senior migrants were not new to post-war Florida. The Sunshine state attracted retirees of means as early as 1885, when the American Medical Association declared Florida's temperate climate and fresh sea breezes

120. Hubert Stroud, *The Promise of Paradise*, 1.

121. Research Division, Metropolitan Dade County Planning Department, *Estimate of the Elderly Resident Population of Dade County, 65 Years of Age and Over, as of June 30, 1975, by Census Tract* (Miami, 1976), 1; William Jenna, *Metropolitan Miami: A Demographic Overview* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), 33-34.

122. "Florida's Superboom: People, Prosperity – and Problems," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 11, 1973.

123. "Florida's Superboom," 87; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 188-192.

ideal for a long and healthy life. In 1924 travel writer and novelist Kenneth Lewis Roberts amused *Saturday Evening Post* readers with his description of Florida as a salubrious paradise for the retired businessman. “It is certain that there are many hale and hearty gentlemen swinging mean mashies on Florida golf links who entered the state for the purpose of dying not so many years ago;” declared Roberts, “so it is not at all unlikely that the climate is responsible for the unretiring [sic] natures of the retired business men who have retired to the activities of Florida.”¹²⁴

By mid-century, these graying executives’ once exclusive haven swarmed with retired salesmen and teachers, army officers and ministers who now enjoyed proficient savings and pensions to purchase their own little corner of paradise. “I love the green grass, the flowers, and my own bananas growing in the back yard ... [My Miami home is] as close to heaven as one can get,” reported retired Detroit police chief, Emory Hudson, in a testimonial for George and Jane Dusenbury’s book, *How to Retire to Florida* (1959).¹²⁵ Retired Oklahoma social worker Ethel Grattan appeared equally as pleased by her new surroundings. In 1955 Grattan migrated to Homestead, Florida, a quiet town located twenty-eight miles south of Miami. “There is practically unlimited choice of pastime,” Grattan explained. “A group of us drive to Coconut Grove for theater during the season, swim in Bay Front Lagoon, and make short trips for all kinds of interesting things.”¹²⁶ Retired railroad clerk Jay See moved to South Florida in 1951, where life was “never dull.” “With our many friends, there is much entertainment, card playing, shuffleboard, and outdoor picnics,” he told the Dusenburys. See and his wife found summers in their hometown of Wood Ridge, New Jersey “oppressive,”

124. Kenneth Lewis Roberts, “Florida Loafing,” *Saturday Evening Post*, May 17, 1924.

125. Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 55.

126. *Ibid.*, 55.

and enjoyed Florida's surprisingly comfortable climate. "We live two miles from the ocean front ... the sun is hot, but there is always that east breeze, and the humidity is no problem."¹²⁷

Testimonials published by boosters like the Dusenburys helped to entice hundreds of thousands of retirees to the state, but post-war developments in technology, transportation, and defense spending also played an important role in making Florida an attractive and practical destination. Of these, the widespread availability of air-conditioning probably had the greatest impact. Central air-conditioning was first installed in homes throughout the South in the mid-1950s, an innovation that retirees like Jay See surely appreciated, despite South Florida's refreshing breezes. The central air conditioner replaced the less efficient window model, which had been introduced to homeowners only a few years earlier. Prior to that time, Southerners might escape the summer heat for the air-conditioned comfort of a movie theater, department store, or hotel lobby, but few private residences enjoyed such luxury.¹²⁸

The 1950s also ushered in a new age of affordable and convenient travel, as highways and airliners crisscrossed the Sunbelt and the rest of the country in exploding numbers. Rabbi Irving Lehrman of Miami Beach described such innovations as having "conditioned ... every aspect of growth" in his mid-century community. "Flagler brought the locomotive and Collins the auto; today, the Miami International Airport, one of the largest in the nation, accommodates a large proportion of the nearly two-million annual visitors to the island,"

127. Ibid., 63.

128. "The Air-Conditioned Census," *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1970; Raymond Arsenault, "The End of the Long Hot Summer: The Air Conditioner and Southern Culture," in Raymond Mohl, ed, *Searching for the Sunbelt: Historical Perspectives on a Region* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 176-211; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 205.

noted Lehrman.¹²⁹ The construction of the Miami International Airport and the development of commercial airports in cities across the country made the journey to Florida faster and easier than ever before.¹³⁰ “As most of the large metropolitan areas were linked with Miami by direct flights, the airlines helped build the new ‘mass market’ era in tourism” explained an expert with the University of Miami’s Center for Urban Studies.¹³¹ A survey of Miami tourists found that air travel edged out train travel for the first time in 1951.¹³² By 1971, roughly eighty percent of all Miami visitors journeyed by airplane.¹³³

At mid-century the automobile remained the most popular way to travel to Miami, with more than forty-three percent of vacationers arriving by car.¹³⁴ The development of the interstate highway system five years later further increased the flow of Florida-bound motorists.¹³⁵ Affordable motels soon lined U.S. Highway One North and South of Miami, as the tourist trade grew to encompass roughly a fifth of the Dade County economy.¹³⁶ In 1955

129. Irving Lehrman and Joseph Rappaport, *The Jewish Community of Miami Beach* (Miami Beach: American Jewish History Center of the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1954), 26.

130. *Profile of Metropolitan Dade County: Conditions and Needs* (Miami: Metropolitan Dade Co. Community Improvement Program, 1972), 24; Blaine Brownwell, “Introduction,” in Raymond Mohl, ed, *Searching for the Sunbelt*, 1.

131. Jenna, *Metropolitan Miami*, 36.

132. At that time 29.7 percent of vacationers arrived by plane compared to 23.6 percent who traveled by train. See: Bennett, Victor, Charles Wurst, *Characteristics of the Tourists in Greater Miami, 1951-52* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1953), 4.

133. Jenna, *Metropolitan Miami*, 35.

134. Bennett and Wurst, 4.

135. Brownwell, 1.

136. Arthur Himbert, “All Roads to Miami: Travel Will Be Easier, Accommodations More Plentiful for Winter Visitors,” *New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1951; Arthur Himbert, “Mass Move to Miami: The Beach and the City Opening New Hotels and Motels for the Holiday,” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1952; Arthur Himbert, “Gilding the Lily that is Miami Beach,” *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1955; Herbert Koshetz, “Miami Becoming All-Year Resort,” *New York Times*, Jan. 25, 1953; Agnes Ash, “Silver Lining Along the Gold Coast: Miami and Miami Beach Both Depend on Tourism and Vacation Dollar,” *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1965.

developers built more than 2,000 hotel and motel rooms on Miami Beach alone.¹³⁷ By 1970 the Florida Hotel and Restaurant Commission counted nearly 210,000 hotels and motels in greater Miami, serving an estimated eight-million tourists a year.¹³⁸

A substantial number of these vacationers included older Americans. In 1951 adults over the age of forty composed twenty-five percent of Miami tourists.¹³⁹ By 1971 that percentage had tripled. Surveys soon indicated that the “younger set” preferred “going elsewhere,” but older tourists offered Miami's travel industry some important advantages. Seasoned travelers generally had more money to spend than their younger counterparts. The majority, moreover, enjoyed returning to Florida year after year and many eventually retired to the area.¹⁴⁰ This pattern was particularly pronounced on Miami Beach, where in 1965, twenty-eight percent of permanent residents were over the age of sixty-five -- many of them, retired North easterners.¹⁴¹ The Beach soon gained a reputation for catering to retirees. Younger tourists and residents even described the city as an unwelcoming place for families with children.¹⁴²

Many military retirees, like older tourists, returned to settle permanently in Florida. By mid-century the Sunbelt drew an increasing percentage of America's defense-spending dollars. Defense plants and military bases sprouted up across Florida, California, Texas, and

137. The Miami Beach accommodations contributed to a grand total of 51,000 hotels and motels in Greater Miami that year. See: C.E. Wright, “Season at Miami Growing Momentum,” *New York Times*, Feb. 6, 1955; Himbert, “Gilding the Lily.”

138. Jenna, *Metropolitan Miami*, 35.

139. Bennett and Wurst, 26.

140. Burns, “Patterns and Characteristics of Migration into Florida,” 78; Jenna, *Metropolitan Miami*, 35-36.

141. Ash, “Silver Lining.”

142. Jenna, *Metropolitan Miami*, 35.

Virginia -- states which offered the advantage of a temperate training climate, as well as less expensive labor, land, and living costs. Military personnel and their families composed an important segment of the Sunbelt migrant stream and retirees were among their numbers. Rather than returning north to their home states, these retired officers and generals sought the medical and recreational privileges available by living near their former posts.¹⁴³

Aging vacationers and army officers who considered retiring to Florida would find much encouraging literature on the subject. After perusing the testimonials peppered throughout George and Jane Dusenburys's book, potential migrants might turn to any number of additional works made available by the burgeoning business of retirement publishing. These included: Needham Hines's, *The Truth About Florida* (1958); Richard Hayes's *How to Live Like a Retired Millionaire on Less Than \$250 a Month* (1962); Year Round Publishing's *Everything You Need to Know About Retiring in Florida* (1966); Burt Garnett's *How to Retire to Florida and Trade Old Lives for New* (1966); and Selina Thompson's *Birds on a Banana Tree: Or How Not to Retire and Move to Florida* (1978). While claiming an even-handed, unbiased approach, most of these books -- along with scores of articles and advertisements on the subject -- proudly promoted the many advantages of Florida retirement: the state's healthy, comfortable climate; its affordable cost of living; and the friendly camaraderie of senior-filled communities.¹⁴⁴

143. Brownwell, "Introduction," 1; Bernard Weinstein and Robert Firestone, *Regional Growth and Decline in the United States: The Rise of the Sunbelt and the Decline of the Northeast* (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1978), 23-24; Burt Garnett, *How to Retire to Florida and Trade Old Lives for New* (St. Petersburg, FL: Great Outdoors Publishing Co., 1966), 13.

144. Year Round Publishing, *Everything You Need to Know*; Garnett, *How to Retire to Florida*; Needham Hines, *The Truth About Florida* (Miami: Florida Research Press, 1956); Selina Thomson, *Birds on a Banana Tree: or How Not to Retire and Move to Florida!* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1978). See also: Florida Hotel Commission, *It is Easy to Live in Florida on Any Budget* (Tallahassee: Florida Hotel Commission, 1941); Stephen Flynn, *Florida: Land of Fortune* (Washington, D.C.: Luce Publishing, 1962); Carroll Scott, *Successful Retirement in Florida: Your Survival Guide to the Pleasures and Pitfalls of Florida Retirement* (Longwood, FL: Sunrise House, 1974).

Nearly every mid-century advice book on Florida retirement described the benefits of the state's warm and "gentle" climate. The authors claimed that individuals with ailments such as asthma, hay fever, diabetes, arthritis, and digestive disorders could live longer, more comfortable lives in the Sunshine State.¹⁴⁵ "It's been exhilarating to me to hear so many men and women claim that moving to Florida has extended the length of their lives. I wish you could meet the couples, approaching eighty, who left their children and friends in their native towns and cities, who are confident they would not be living today had they stayed in the north," boasted Hines.¹⁴⁶ Authors assured retirees that they would benefit from fresh air cleansed by ocean breezes and free from the many pollutants found in the industrialized north.¹⁴⁷ They also cited Florida's salubrious sunshine. "Health-wise medical scientists have proven that with enough exposure to sunlight the average human being needs no additional vitamins beyond those formed by the sun from the sterols in the skin," reported Hines. "For many, the rays of Florida's winter sun serve the same purpose as half a dozen bottles of vitamin pills." According to Hines, even the common cold evaporated in the Florida sunshine: "One man I talked to in gathering material for this book told me he came to Florida in 1945, eleven years ago, and had yet to have his first cold. A woman admitted to me she had contracted a cold once but it was because her sister came down from the north on a visit and brought the bug with her."¹⁴⁸

Climate also contributed to Florida's second major selling point: cost of living. "It is definitely true that a retiree can live better for less in Florida than almost anywhere else in

145. Hines, *The Truth About Florida*, 11-12, 18-19, 28-34; Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 34, 92-93; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 83-98; Scott, *Successful Retirement*, 7-8.

146. Hines, *The Truth About Florida*, 18.

147. Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 92-93; Scott, *Successful Retirement*, 8.

148. Hines, *The Truth About Florida*, 18.

this country,” reported the Year Round Publishing Company. “Savings are possible in clothing, fuel, housing and recreation.”¹⁴⁹ Florida’s warm weather made houses cheaper to build and maintain. Homes were frequently constructed of cement block, without basements, insulation, or heating systems.¹⁵⁰ By retiring to Florida, pensioners could purchase more “home” for their money and save on heating bills.¹⁵¹ The state’s liberal tax laws offered further financial inducement. The Homestead Exemption Act, created in the 1930s to encourage state population growth, provided tax relief to homeowners on the first \$5,000 of their property’s assessed value.¹⁵² In 1972 these exemptions doubled to \$10,000 for permanent residents over the age of sixty-five who had resided in Florida for at least five years.¹⁵³ The absence of state income and inheritance taxes also encouraged migration.¹⁵⁴

Finally, Florida's warm weather eliminated the need for costly winter coats and wardrobes that changed with the season.¹⁵⁵ Miami resident and author Burt Garnett advised female migrants to forgo high-end fashions and the extra expense of hats, gloves, and stockings. “Comfort is an objective in nearly all items of clothing and means that women dress ‘down’ a little,” he explained. “The shirt-waist type of dress is favored by most ... and

149. Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 33.

150. Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 20; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 279-280.

151. Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 279-280; Flynn, 186-187.

152. *How to Retire to Florida*, 63; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 13; Flynn, 188-189; Scott, 39-42; Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 16, 34.

153. Scott, *Successful Retirement*, 39-40; *Aging* (May 1972), No. 211: 18.

154. Garnett, *How to Retire to Florida*, 64; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 13; Hines, *The Truth About Florida*, 20; Flynn, 187-188; Scott, *Successful Retirement*, 40; Folsom, 2; Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 41.

155. Hines, *The Truth About Florida*, 20, 23; Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 5, 278-279; *How to Retire to Florida*, 43-44; Charley Stookey, “Low Cost of Retirement Even in the Sunshine State,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 3, 1968.

the languid climate also permits widespread wearing of swimsuits for lounge attire – even on the streets. An elderly lady from Michigan visiting her daughter was slightly shocked at this. ‘Mother,’ replied the Floridian, ‘you’re from the Middle West and it’s showing on you.’”¹⁵⁶

The state's easy-going atmosphere offered additional benefits. According to Garnett, Florida housewives spent less energy cooking, ironing, and dusting than their Northern counterparts. Cookouts frequently replaced traditional dinners. Relaxed entertaining required “little use of tablecloths and napery.” Similarly, the heavy furniture and draperies that decorated Northern homes appeared out of place in the Sunshine State's bright and airy abodes.¹⁵⁷ By devoting less attention to household chores, wives and husbands enjoyed more energy for golf and shuffleboard, swimming and sun bathing, picnicking and fishing.¹⁵⁸

In addition to these outdoor pursuits, opportunities for club membership abounded. “The average Florida community of any size is probably much more highly organized than the average community elsewhere, because the state has attracted so many diverse individuals,” stated Year-Round Publishers. “The roster of organizations available to you ... is literally endless.”¹⁵⁹ The guidebooks cited state clubs such as the New York Retirees' Association and the Pennsylvania Club, as well as organizations for retirees from specific industries, among them the Retired Telephone Workers Association. They also mentioned university alumni societies, veterans' organizations, and local Elk, Moose, Mason, Eastern Star, and B'nai B'rith chapters.

For the prospective retiree nervous about leaving old friends and family members

156. Garnett, *How to Retire to Florida*, 43-45.

157. Garnett, *How to Retire to Florida*, 44-46; Thompson, *Birds on a Banana Tree*, 20-21.

158. Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 106; Scott, *Successful Retirement*, 9.

159. Year Round Publishers, *Everything You Need to Know*, 66.

behind, the guidebooks noted that these organizations provided the perfect opportunity to build new relationships. Florida's clubs and communities included substantial numbers of migrants who were eager to socialize. "The fact that so many of Florida's residents are relative newcomers is perhaps one of the most encouraging factors for new retirees," assured one author. "As a result, your neighbors aren't likely to be members of some rigid clique. On the contrary, retirement often provides the 'common blood' relationship which frequently brings new Florida residents into close personal contact with one another."¹⁶⁰ "If you retire to Florida on a fixed retirement income, you will find thousands of others in the same situation," concluded the George and Jane Dusenbury. "You will be able to enjoy daily companionship in inexpensive recreation and social life. The state offers opportunities for all kinds of hobbies and recreation at little or no cost and the sunshine is free."¹⁶¹

Birds of a Feather: The Demographics of Retiree Migration

As the guidebooks suggested, many migrants soon found themselves at home among the palms. "If you think you'll miss the folks back home, chances are that other Northerners or Midwesterners have chosen the same place to retire that you did – and for the same reasons," asserted author Selina Thomson. "'Birds of a feather' applies to retirees flocking to Florida."¹⁶² Some migrants selected communities composed entirely of Northerners with similar socio-economic backgrounds, occupations, and even hometowns in common. In 1956, the entire city of Dearborn, Michigan considered the benefits of Florida sunshine when Mayor Orville Hubbard proposed building a second, city-owned Dearborn on Florida's

160. Scott, *Successful Retirement*, 8.

161. Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 285.

162. Thomson, *Birds on a Banana Tree*, 9, 104.

Southwestern coast. This sister city, Orville reasoned, would provide the perfect spot for Dearborn's older citizens. Numerous roadblocks prevented Hubbard from constructing an entire retirement town, but the mayor's tenacity finally paid off. In 1967 the city purchased an eight-story apartment building in Clearwater Florida from the federal government. Soon many Dearborn retirees called the Clearwater complex, dubbed Dearborn Towers, home.¹⁶³

Hubbard was not the only Northerner fulfilling a "dreams of sunbeams." As early as 1953, so many older migrants had arrived in the state that the Florida Division of Research on Retirement¹⁶⁴ joined the Industrial Relations Center at the University of Chicago to study retiree adjustment in Florida. Who were these migrants, the Commission wondered, and what characteristics eased a person's transition to retirement in the Sunshine state?¹⁶⁵ Florida boosters must have been pleased with the results of the study which described migrants as younger, healthier, wealthier, and more educated than the older adults they left behind.¹⁶⁶ They were also more likely to be married and retired from the workforce than non-movers.¹⁶⁷

As expected, such qualities eased adjustment for incoming retirees, while benefiting

163. "A Sunny Idea Shine in Frigid Michigan," *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1956; "Hubbard's Hotel," *Newsweek*, Dec. 4, 1967; David Good, *Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn – The Rise and Fall of Orville L. Hubbard* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 45, 268-269, 326-327.

164. The Division was created in 1949 by Governor Fuller Warren as a component of the Florida State Improvement Commission. See: "Chicago-Florida Joint Committee for Research on Aging and Retirement," *Aging* (March 1953): 5.

165. Irving Webber, "Fact Finding in Florida," *Aging* (Aug 1951): 5; "Chicago-Florida Joint Committee," 5.

166. As Jennifer Anne Woodward explains, migrating seniors differed in numerous ways from the average elderly population, because migration was a selective process, especially among older Americans. Historically, the great majority of seniors did *not* migrate, and elderly interstate migrants tended to be "positively selected," with a "selectively [that] increases with distance." See: Jennifer Anne Woodward, "Aging-In-Place and Migration as Sources of Projected Population Growth: An Analysis for Arizona, California, Florida, and New York" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Geography, University of Colorado, 1987), 86.

167. It is important to note that while in-migrating retirees to Florida and other Southern states were wealthier, healthier, and more educated than the older adults they left behind, seniors native to the South lagged behind rest of the country in all of these categories. See: Stuart Rosenfeld and Mary Eldridge, "Growing Old Southern," *Southern Exposure* (March-June, 1985), Vol. XIII, 130-132.

the communities in which they settled. Retiring migrants of good health and moderate wealth increased demand for retail goods, while putting little stress on the state's labor market, public health and social service systems.¹⁶⁸ "Almost any community in Florida wants retirees," explained Garnett. "You're as welcome as can be. Whatever retirement income you have to spend – pensions, social security checks – will be happily received by ... corner grocers, beauty parlors, doctors, realtors, and other trades-folk."¹⁶⁹ While guidebooks stressed the affability of Floridian communities, state officials did not wish to encourage the influx of needy migrants. J. M. Buck, manager of the retirement department of the Florida Development Commission warned, "In fairness to individuals planning to retire in Florida, and in the interest of Florida taxpayers, it is our policy to discourage marginally dependent persons from migrating to Florida. Self-respect – which is basic to contentment – hinges upon reasonable assurance of self-support."¹⁷⁰

Demographic studies also noted that retired migrants represented a higher percentage of white Americans than the national over-sixty population. This was especially true of migrants to Florida, a fact of which Dearborn's Orville Hubbard may well have been aware.¹⁷¹ The subtropical haven that Hubbard -- a notorious segregationist -- envisioned most certainly excluded blacks. After the success of Dearborn Towers, the mayor announced his

intention to inaugurate a second similar facility in Florida. Michigan's Civil Rights

168. Woodward, "Aging-in-Place," 85-86; Longino, et al., 176-177; Jeanne Biggar, *The Graying of the Sunbelt: Elderly Migration, Population Trends and Public Policy*, #6 (Population Reference Bureau, October 1984), 13-21.

169. Garnett, *How to Retire in Florida*, 11.

170. Dusenbury, *How to Retire to Florida*, 272-273.

171. In 1952 Florida's Retirement Research Division noted that "a vast majority of ... older migrants to Florida are white persons ... [and that] Florida was the only state in which the proportion of white persons in the older ages was considerably higher than that in the total population." The study indicated that in 1940 less than twenty percent of the state's sixty-five plus population was non-white. See: *Florida's Older Population*, viii, 22-29.

Commission stepped in this time, declaring that the Federal Housing Administration should “not to be a partner in future property transactions which will result in reinforcing and extending segregated housing patterns.” Hubbard’s dream of creating another retirement community dissolved under ongoing controversy over Dearborn Tower’s discriminatory rental practices.¹⁷²

If it weren’t for the interference of Michigan’s Civil Rights Commission, Hubbard’s second proposal probably would have received warm welcome in Florida. As early as 1952, Walter Keyes, director of the Florida State Improvement Commission, encouraged the creation of “satellite communities” for incoming seniors. Employers, labor unions, and other groups could build such developments on the outskirts of Florida’s major metropolitan areas, he explained in a speech before the American Society of Planning Officials. Keyes envisioned nearly self-sufficient villages complete with recreational facilities and community centers, and a variety of housing options. Such communities, Keyes’s argued, offered the most effective means of “meeting the needs of the vast influx of retired people into the state.”¹⁷³ In 1954, the State Improvement Commission further identified the retirement community as a practical means of preventing elderly migrants’ future dependence on state welfare programs. Whether or not the rapid development of semi-isolated communities composed of self-selected, like-minded retirees amounted to an effective elder care strategy, numerous private and non-profit organizations took up the Commission’s call.

In 1953 the Upholsterer’s International Union of North America purchased a 615-acre tract of land twelve miles north of West Palm Beach. The retirement village, named Salhaven, included an infirmary, a man-made lake, and a recreation facility, in addition to

172. Good, *Orvie*, 327, 428.

173. “Housing for the Aged: Action Programs are Beginning to Take Shape,” *Journal of Housing* (June 1952).

cottages and apartments.¹⁷⁴ In the 1960s the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO also created retirement communities in Florida. Elderly union members and their spouses might relocate to any one of the union's Four Freedom retirement hotels, including the President Madison, located on Miami Beach. Completed in 1960, the President Madison provided guests with game rooms, a restaurant, swimming pool, and planned recreation. The venture proved so popular that the union constructed a Four Freedom's apartment complex across the street from the hotel in 1963.¹⁷⁵

By the 1960s and 1970s many similar retirement developments dotted the Florida landscape. At the 1974 Southern Conference on Gerontology, presenters noted the tremendous community transformations that accompanied elderly newcomers. "It is common knowledge that Florida is a fast growing state, and residents of the state dwell daily with the visible evidences of rapid change. Many communities have boom town characteristics ... If you move away today from your 'old home town' in Florida, you will not recognize it if in a few years you return."¹⁷⁶

Among the hundreds of thousands of incoming seniors who made this booming retirement frontier home – and among the many more who remained rooted in their home towns – the future looked bright. Newly retired men and women counted their health and relative wealth a blessing and they looked forward to many comfortable and independent

174. "The Sponsored Neighborhood Village," *Aging* (May 1953), 3; "Upholsterers Union to Build Resort Town for Pensioners," *Journal of Housing* (Aug-Sept 1955); William Arnett, "Designs of Florida Retirement Villages," in Ernest W. Burgess, ed., *Retirement Villages* (University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1961), 45-46; William Arnett, "Housing Florida's Older People," in Irving Webber, ed., *Aging: A Current Appraisal, A Report on the Sixth Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology* (University of Florida Press: Gainesville, 1956).

175. "Unions Set-Up 'Four Freedoms' to Build Nationwide Housing," *Aging* (Feb. 1962), 4-5; Burt Garnett, "Union Tries An Experiment," *Miami News*, Feb. 28, 1961; "A Successful Experiment in Helping the Elderly," *Miami News*, Sept. 5, 1965; Ben Schneider, "\$2,520,000 Loan Granted By U.S.," *Miami News*, Oct. 30, 1962.

176. Carter C. Osterbind and Charlotte Menke, "Older People in a Mobile Society," in Carter C. Osterbind ed, *Migration, Mobility and Aging: A Report on the 23rd Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 1-2.

years of relaxation and leisure. Governmental policies and programs, countless books and articles on retirement, and marketing campaigns aimed at older consumers all helped to foster high expectations of retirement among white working- and middle-class Americans. Colorful brochures and memories of sunny sea-side vacations lured growing numbers of elderly men and women away from their families, home towns, and community associations in the belief that their retirement years would be better spent in Florida. The reality of daily life in the Sunshine State soon proved much more complicated, however.



Illustration 1: Prospective migrants tour Florida¹⁷⁷

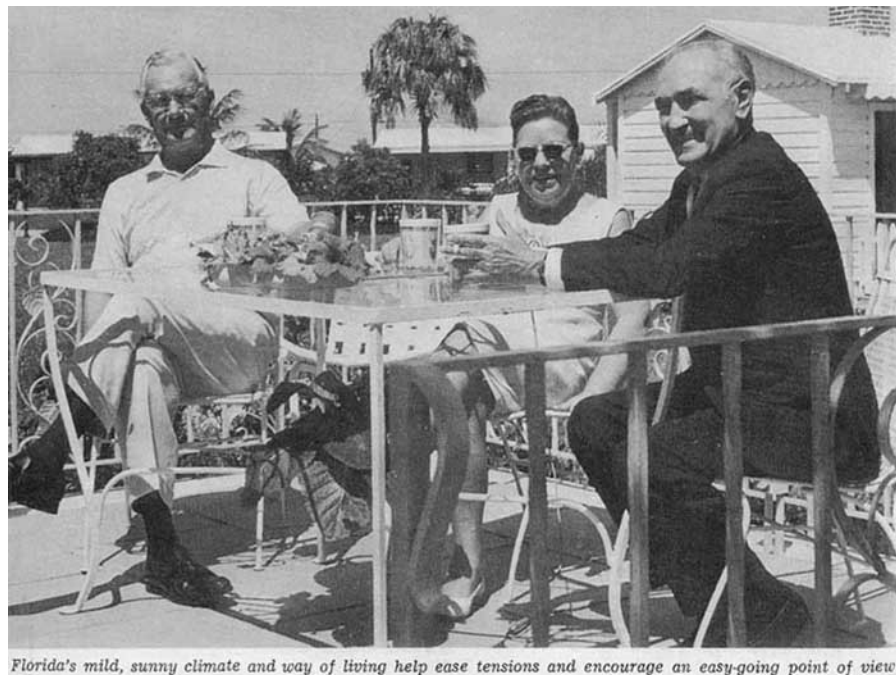


Illustration 2: Retirement books and brochures extol Florida's easy-going social life¹⁷⁸

177. *Everything You Need to Know About Retiring in Florida*, 12.

178. *Ibid.*, 96.

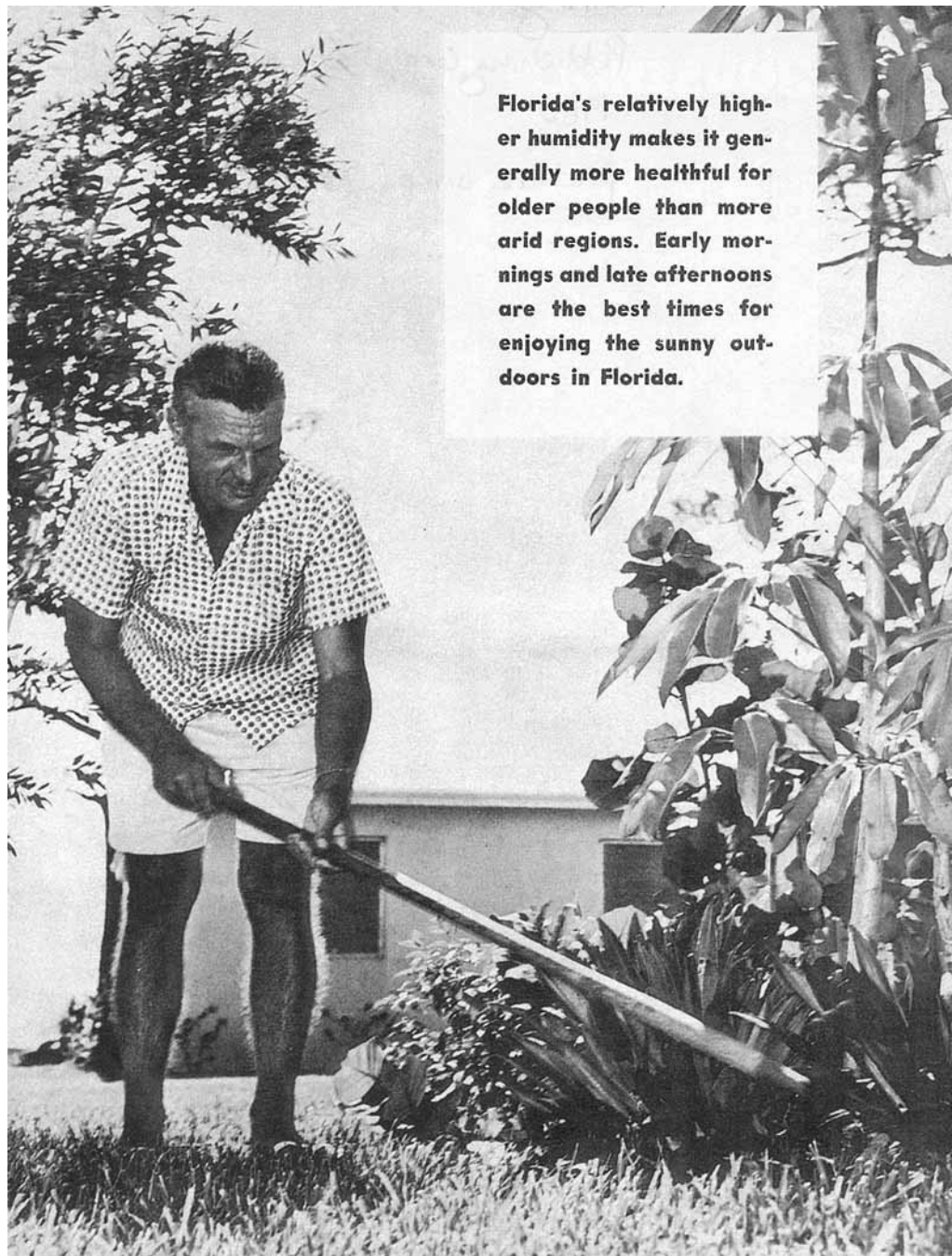


Illustration 3: State boosters tout the advantages of Florida's warm climate¹⁷⁹

179. Ibid., 101



Illustration 4: Miami Beach's Fleetwood Retirement Hotel, 1968 brochure¹⁸⁰

180. Florida Collection, Miami Public Library.

CHAPTER TWO

SEGREGATING THE SUNSET YEARS: THE REALITIES OF LIFE ON THE RETIREMENT FRONTIER

Certain Measures of Protection: The Growth of Specialized Housing for Seniors

“The village green will extend the complete length of the sixty-seven acres,” announced Reverend Schumacher as he guided prospective tenants across the multi-million-dollar East Ridge retirement community under construction in southern Dade County. Ground was first broken on the project in April 1961. A year later, tidy brick cottages began to rim the village green, along with a dining hall, beauty parlor, and sundries shop. Schumacher had been planning this project with missionary zeal since his appointment as executive director of the Lutheran Senior Citizen Foundation in 1957. Created by the Missouri Synod’s Florida-Georgia district, the Foundation was charged with the responsibility of constructing a retirement community to serve seniors’ special needs. Upon completion 400 residents, all over the age of sixty, would call the village home.¹⁸¹

Leading the tour group into a model cottage, the reverend explained the concepts behind its unique features. “We maintain that for the elderly to keep self worth, three things basically are needed. These are maximum security, maximum independence, and the element to choose – whether it be friends, choosing food to eat or a place to live.” The cottages, designed with assistance from University of Miami gerontologists, featured wall-to-wall

181. “Building of Retirement Village to Start,” *Miami Herald*, March, 20, 1961; “South Dade’s Promised Land,” *Miami News*, April 1, 1962.

carpeting to cushion falls, extra wide doors to accommodate wheel chairs, and grab bars in the bathroom. Arranged around seven neighborhood courts, individual residences included private porches and gardens and adjoined common recreation, dining, and laundry facilities.¹⁸²

East Ridge and thousands of communities like it represented a popular new concept in housing. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, alms houses and nursing homes sheltered needy and frail elderly, but individual residences and communities designed for more independent seniors did not exist. The novel notion that housing should accommodate the special needs of older Americans exploded in popularity after the Second World War. “On the whole ... those in the early years of life and the later years of life require certain measures of protection; and housing, like other factors in human living, must take into account the needs of young children and of the aging persons,” concluded the American Public Health Association in 1953. “So far, in the United States, our socially organized housing programs have been focused primarily on families with children and little has been done to provide for older persons. It is more than time that we give some consideration to the other extremity of the life span.” The association called for housing that addressed older Americans' particular financial, health, and leisure requirements.¹⁸³ Growing numbers of gerontological experts, government officials, developers, and retirees agreed. Many believed that age-segregated communities such as East Ridge best fulfilled this mandate.¹⁸⁴

182. “South Dade’s Promised Land.”

183. American Public Health Association, *Housing An Aging Population, A Contribution of the Subcommittee on Standards for Housing the Aged and Infirm* (Lancaster, PA: Lancaster Press, 1953), vii-20.

184. Webber and Osterbind, “Types of Retirement Villages,” 3; Geneva Mathiasen, “Some Current Attempts at Better Buildings for the Aging,” *Architectural Record* (May 1956), 197-202; Robert E. Alexander, “Designing the Right House for Aunt Lizzie: She Refuses to be an Old Lady at 80-Odd, So What’s to be Done?,” *Housing Yearbook* (Washington, DC: National Housing Conference, 1956), 52-54; “Housing Boom for the Elderly,” *Housing Yearbook* (Washington, DC: National Housing Conference, 1964), 42-43; Hertha Kraus, “Housing Our

The 1961 White House Conference on Aging put senior housing in the national spotlight. One highlight of the conference was the “Freedom Home,” an American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and Douglas Fir Plywood Association concept home created for retirees. Drawing on insights and suggestions gathered at an AARP housing conference held the previous year, the Freedom Home provided inexpensive, attractive, safe, and hassle-free accommodation. The \$10,000, 888-square-foot home featured a light-filled, open floor plan with cathedral ceilings and a central garden court. A hobby room provided space for craft and building projects. Like East Ridge, the design incorporated innovative features such as low work surfaces, grab bars, non-skid floors, wide doors, and ramps.¹⁸⁵

Timed to coincide with the conference, a life-size model of the home was built and furnished on the downtown mall in Washington, D.C. Thousands of conference delegates, politicians, and celebrities toured the home, which received extensive praise and press coverage. In an AARP poll of visitors, more than half described their current homes as unsuitable for retirement and over eighty percent approved of the price and style of the Freedom House. Congressman and conference leader, John Fogarty declared the model home a successful demonstration of “practical action” and a “symbol, an opportunity, and a hope to America's elderly and aging population.”¹⁸⁶

The Freedom Home soon evolved from an opportunity into concrete reality. Over the next year, 200 homes based on the model were built for a new retirement village in Saint

Older Citizens,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (January 1952), 126-130, 133-134; National Association of Housing and Redevelopment, *Toward Good Housing for the Aged, Selected Articles from the Journal of Housing* (National Association, 1956), i, 2-3, 5.

185. American Plywood Association, *Builder's Guide*, section iv, 6; “Our Big News is Freedom Home,” *Modern Maturity* (Feb/March 1961), 4-6; “Freedom Home,” *Modern Maturity* (April/May 1961), 16.

186. American Plywood Association, *Builder's Guide*, section iv, 6; “Our Big News is Freedom Home,” 4-6; “Freedom Home,” 16.

Petersburg, Florida. Numerous other builders and non-profit groups took inspiration from the Freedom Home as they developed their own retirement villages. Some, such as East Ridge, paid careful attention to the design details so roundly applauded by conference attendees. Others described their dwellings as “senior housing” but offered little more than small, single family homes in country-club settings.¹⁸⁷

Developers generally marketed these villages to middle- and upper-middle-class seniors, but other forms of specialty housing catered to retirees of lesser means. “The ground is ... fertile for the thousands of elderly persons in Greater Miami who must plant old roots in new soil,” trumpeted a 1959 *Miami Herald* story on Florida retirement. “Providing them with places to live where they can be comfortable and happy is the goal of many groups – commercial, social, religious, and governmental. Already this area offers just about any type of accommodation imaginable.”¹⁸⁸ These included age-segregated trailer parks, retirement hotels, condominiums, and apartment communities. Even the government took an active role in senior housing. At a time when many Americans were struggling to dismantle racial segregation, the government provided grants and low-interest loans for the private development of age-segregated housing. And by the 1960s, local governments across the country were also working with federal authorities to design public housing units reserved exclusively for low-income elders.¹⁸⁹

187. Irving Webber and Carter Osterbind, “Types of Retirement Villages,” in Ernest Burgess ed., *Retirement Villages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1961), 6; American Plywood Association, *Builder's Guide*, section iv, 2, 6; Charles Grutzner, “Housing for Aged is Found Lacking: Many 'Retirement Villages' Fall Short on Goals, Planning Group is Told,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1960.

188. Juanita Greene, “There is Room and Pleasure in Miami Area for Aging,” *Miami Herald*, Feb 11, 1959.

189. *Adequacy of Federal Response to Housing Needs of Older Americans, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing for the Elderly of the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, Part 1* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1971), 2, 17, 52; *Adequacy of Federal Response to Housing Needs of Older Americans, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Housing for the Elderly of the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, Part II* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1971), 74-77, 111-112; *Adequacy of Federal Response to Housing Needs of Older Americans, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on*

Glossy brochures and guided tours convinced hundreds of thousands of mid-century seniors to start life anew in one of Florida's burgeoning retirement communities. For those with adequate physical and financial health, these age-segregated settings appeared to fulfill expectations. Ensnared within carefully controlled environs, retirees enjoyed a sense of security. They touted the benefits of living among their peers and appreciated their neighborhoods' numerous social and recreational amenities. Such semi-secluded living came at a cost, however, especially as residents grew older and their savings dwindled. While grab bars, wheel-chair ramps, and other features helped relatively fit elders maintain their independence, few retirement villages, hotels, and housing projects provided long-term care. When ailing seniors turned to the wider community for help, moreover, they soon discovered a strong resistance among policy makers and the general public to adequately address their growing health and welfare needs. By the late 1970s and 1980s, many once vibrant retiree communities left residents feeling isolated and abandoned as home-bound seniors struggled to care for themselves. Those who lost their grip on independence, meanwhile, often endured even an bleaker segregation inside Florida nursing homes.

A Common Bond?: The Age-Segregated Retirement Community

Miami's new age-segregated communities appealed to prospective tenants who generally gave little thought to their future need for long-term care. Despite the provision of certain safety features, most seniors focused on the opportunity to interact with healthy and

Housing for the Elderly of the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, Part III (Washington, DC: GPO, 1971), 117-119; Robert Newcomer, "Meeting the Housing Needs of Older People," in M. Powell Lawton ed., *Community Planning for an Aging Society: Designing Services and Facilities* (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc, 1976), 64-80; William Baer, "Federal Housing Programs for the Elderly," *Community Planning for an Aging Society*, 81, 90; Phil Jones et al., *A Report on Services to the Elderly – Dade County's Programs to House the Elderly* (Washington, DC: National Association of Counties Research Foundation, 1976), 2-3, 7-11; "Housing Boom for the Elderly," 42-43; Ben Schneider, "\$2,520,000 Loan Granted By U.S.," *Miami News*, Oct 30, 1962.

leisured members of their own generation in plush, recreational settings. As Reverend Schumacher guided tour groups along East Ridge's winding walkways and leafy greens, the comfortable atmosphere may well have reminded retirees of their grandchildren's college campuses. Like many university settings, typical retirement villages encompassed private, park-like environments on the outskirts of large metropolitan areas. Like a university campus, moreover, these communities contained numerous features that made them relatively self-sufficient. Many included recreation and entertainment facilities, as well as administrative offices, sundries shops, and on-site security and emergency response. Finally, like universities, retirement villages created a distinctive cultural atmosphere. Just as college campuses provided a largely age-segregated setting where youth culture flourished, retirement villages were developed on the premise that age-exclusive communities also suited older Americans' distinctive outlooks and way of life.¹⁹⁰

East Ridge architects, marketers, and directors subscribed to this position, suggesting that retirees felt most at home surrounded by members of their own generation. "In these special years our thoughts are crystallized by knowledge gained through experience. Youth, even members of our own family, might not understand our views which are so firmly formed through the fire of trial and error," explained the community's 1968 brochure. "At East Ridge you live with your contemporaries, who like you, express themselves with depth."¹⁹¹ Eighty-two-year-old widower and East Ridge resident B.D. Sheffield agreed whole-heartedly. "The greatest thing we have here is a common bond – age," Sheffield told a

190. Mid-century sociologist Arnold Rose identified a senior subculture among retirees complete with unique interpersonal relations, activities, customs, and dialect. The premise that retirees developed a senior group identity is further developed in chapter three of this dissertation. See: Arnold Rose, "The Subculture of Aging: A Framework for Research in Social Gerontology," in Arnold Rose and Warren Peterson, eds., *Older People and Their Social World: The Subculture of the Aging* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1965), 3-16.

191. East Ridge brochure, 1968.

local reporter. “People like us don’t have anything in common with other generations, but here we understand each other.”¹⁹²

Unlike the college campus, which was well rooted in American history and culture, the brand-new, age-exclusive retirement village sparked fierce debate. Despite East Ridge's success in attracting residents, the community troubled Miami physician Maurice Heck. Heck admitted that East Ridge offered a tempting, resort-like existence, but he advised aging Floridians that they would live longer, healthier lives if they remained integrated within the wider community. William Arnett, Dean of the University of Florida’s College of Architecture, agreed. Arnett favored many of the new housing designs created for older clients. He cited the benefits of ramps and elevators, non-slip floors, effective lighting, and easy to reach electrical sockets. He warned members of the 1956 Southern Conference on Gerontology, however, that most retirement villages were designed for easy profit and that their segregated settings proved detrimental to retirees. Community participation, he argued, helped seniors to maintain their vitality, independence, and self-esteem.¹⁹³

The carefully controlled, homogenized atmosphere of these villages – dubbed “golden ghettos” by anthropologist Margaret Mead – received pointed criticism. “The worst possible attitude toward old age is to regard the aged as a segregated group, who are to be removed ... from the presence of their families [and] their neighbors ... to live in desolate idleness, relieved only by the presence of others in a similar plight,” argued architectural critic and scholar, Lewis Mumford.¹⁹⁴ Sociologist Jerry Jacobs’s 1974 study of Sun City, an

192. George Newman, “They Call It Retirement Village,” *Miami News*, June 16, 1963.

193. William T. Arnett, “Housing Florida’s Older People,” in Irving Webber, ed, *Aging: A Current Appraisal, A Report on the Sixth Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology* (Gainesville: University of FL Press, 1956), 144-146.

194. L. Mumford, “For Older People Not Segregation but Integration,” *Architectural Record* (May 1956), 192.

age-segregated community of more than 5,000 retirees, described the complex's wide streets, carefully tended lawns and tract homes as a "false paradise."¹⁹⁵ Composed of white, middle-class seniors,¹⁹⁶ Jacobs' survey revealed that residents selected Sun City for safety and security. "There is a feeling that older people in general and ... residents in particular need to stick together ... against a common enemy," noted Jacobs. That enemy included African Americans, Communists, and welfare recipients, as well as young people with their strange dress and loose morals, and the neighboring town to which retirees paid school taxes.¹⁹⁷

Shared fears and prejudices were not enough to create real community cohesion, Jacobs argued. Like East Ridge, Sun City offered numerous opportunities for social interaction. The complex included a shopping center with a coffee house and beauty parlor, a golf course, and a recreation center with a swimming pool, clubrooms, and meeting hall. Yet Jacobs described a community largely devoid of energy and spirit. "From the street the homes show no signs of life," he observed. "Inhabitants are rarely seen walking the sidewalks, sitting outside, tending the yard or making repairs. The only sign of habitation is row after row of large, late-model American cars." The village's shopping and community center seemed similarly subdued, with all signs of life ceasing by early evening.¹⁹⁸

Sun City residents exhibited the classic signs of disengagement. They joined numerous clubs, but remained inactive members. They stayed close to home, venturing

195. Jerry Jacobs, *Fun City: An Ethnographic Study of a Retirement Community* (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974) 83.

196. According to the 1970 Census, Fun City's 5,519 residents, all but two were Caucasian. Fun City's Householder's Directory listed hundreds of retired professionals, business owners, salesmen, civil servants, and military personnel and less than handful of unskilled workers. See Jacobs, *Fun City*, 45-46.

197. *Ibid.*, 66.

198. *Ibid.*, 1, 10. Quote on page 1.

beyond the village for little more than a weekly grocery trip. Weighed down by isolation, they developed what Jacobs described as a “blasé attitude” toward life. Jacobs disagreed with Elaine Cumming and William Henry’s assertion that disengagement was natural and necessary for older adults and the community at large. While he sympathized with retirees’ desire to escape life’s tensions and conflicts, Jacobs deemed these cocoon-like communities artificial and unhealthy. “Most of us, since the fall, have been obligated to accommodate to the imperfect state of man and go through life working for, with, and against one another,” he concluded. “Those searching for paradise seem to be uninformed by the fact that should they encounter it, they will encounter with it ‘culture shock’ and experience it as an alien thing.”¹⁹⁹

In contrast with Jacob's oft-cited ethnography, a number of lesser-known studies lent credence to the belief that semi-segregated settings suited older people. While seniors' active participation in multi-generational households and neighborhoods seemed ideal, sociologist James Peterson noted that most modern Americans led “autonomous and fragmented” lives segregated by age, background, and interests. “Older persons have been socialized since infancy to expect peer group contacts,” he reasoned. Why should they suddenly enjoy the close company of teenagers?²⁰⁰ Time and mobility, moreover, often eroded elderly Americans' home-town connections. Long-time friends and associates moved away or died while newcomers changed the social and cultural demographics of the neighborhood.²⁰¹ “For highly sociable individuals who wish a maximum opportunity for companionship, social life and recreation, [retirement villages] provide optimal life satisfaction,” Peterson concluded.

199. Ibid., 81-83.

200. James Peterson, *A Time For Work, A Time for Leisure: A Study of Retirement Community In-Movers* (L.A.: University of Southern California, 1960), 4-5; Hertha Kraus, “Housing Our Older Citizens,” 133.

201. Peterson, *A Time for Work, A Time for Leisure*, 3-5, 120.

“The majority of individuals attest that they are happy they moved into an age-segregated community. Their life space has expanded, they have more friends, and their participation in recreational activities and in such organizations as the church has expanded.”²⁰²

The truth about retirement communities probably lay somewhere between these two opposing camps. Personal satisfaction with retirement village life depended on innumerable factors, including the quality of the village administration, housing, and services; the proximity of the complex to friends and family and to the wider community; as well as the individual's social nature and state of health. “Personally, I would feel too much as if I were parked in God's waiting room awaiting the arrival of the Grim Reaper to ever find contentment in such a communal mode of living,” contemplated retirement writer and Florida migrant, Selina Thomson. She conceded, however, that many retirees thrived in such settings and appreciated the security and sociability they provided.²⁰³

Whatever the reality, the idea of retiring to an age-segregated, resort-like setting appealed to growing numbers of older Americans.²⁰⁴ In the months following East Ridge's 1962 dedication, administrators received more than 5,000 inquiries from prospective tenants.²⁰⁵ For applicants like retired engineer Arthur Steed, part of East Ridge's appeal probably lay in the community's value as a status symbol. In 1962 this retiree retreat required a founder's gift ranging from \$8,800 to \$12,000 for individuals and from \$12,200 to \$16,875

202. Ibid., 66. Dr. Maurice Hamovitch, director of the social work department at the University of Southern California expressed similar sentiments about the benefits of retirement villages. See: Lawrence Davies, “The Retirement Village: A New Life Style,” *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1970.

203. Selina Thompson, *Birds on a Banana Tree: or How Not to Retire and Move to Florida!* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1978), 163-4.

204. Davies, “The Retirement Village;” Andrew Malcolm, “Leisure Suburb for Elderly Thriving at Sun City, Arizona,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1974; Bodil Nielsen, “Why Retirees Pick An Adult Community,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1979.

205. “East Ridge Retiree Village Dedicated in Perrine Rites,” *Miami Herald*, March 19, 1962.

for couples. The founder's gift, which paid for a life-lease on an East Ridge cottage, could be paid in full or through monthly installments. Residents also paid monthly maintenance fees.²⁰⁶ Similar retirement villages in Florida required payments of \$5,000 to \$10,000 up front and then charged an additional monthly fee of \$100 or more.²⁰⁷ These expenses required healthy savings and pension benefits and would have been too costly for many retirees. The purchase of an East Ridge cottage or a home in one of Florida's other numerous age-restricted retirement villages clearly signaled that the occupants (particularly the male resident) had achieved a certain level of professional and financial success. After retirement, such material status symbols often gained increasing importance for men like Steed who no longer received the daily recognition once garnered from their professional careers.

**'How to Live Like a Retired Millionaire on Less Than \$250 a Month':
Mobile Home Retirement Communities**

Older Americans of lesser means also yearned for the leisured lifestyle so frequently promoted in retirement publications. In a 1968 edition of the Trail-R-Club of America's *How to Live Like a Retired Millionaire on Less than \$250 Month*, author Richard Hayes insisted that the oft overlooked trailer could help seniors of all backgrounds attain luxurious retirements once reserved for the privileged few. "Perhaps you have been prejudiced [against mobile homes] by some of the abominations you have seen alongside our highways?" he challenged. "You should know that those ... decrepit trailers ... are relics left behind by progress." Hayes went on to describe the life he shared with his wife in a their thoroughly modern, adult-only mobile home park. He waxed poetic about the community's palm-lined streets and landscaped gardens, the pitch and putt course, the serpentine pool, and the three-

206. "South Dade's Promised Land;" "They Call it a Retirement Village."

207. "Low Rent Retirement Village is Planned by Rev Honderick," *Miami Herald*, May 11, 1963.

tiered fountain decorated with varicolored lights. “Visitors who live in conventional homes come from miles around to feast their eyes on this fantastic ... scene” boasted Hayes, “for where we live is surely like a dreamland out of the Arabian Nights.”²⁰⁸

A piece of mobile home manufacturer propaganda, Hayes's description clearly protested too much. One less biased retirement writer described mobile home living as a “sardine-can like existence.”²⁰⁹ Retirement columnist Thomas Collins offered a similarly direct assessment when he noted that a mobile home address “would rouse no envy on ... Country Club Lane.”²¹⁰ By the mid-to-late 1960s, however, growing numbers of retired Americans believed that a mobile home could provide them with a snug, 720-square-feet of happiness. “Many people, retirees in particular, are not buying a mobile home just to get another house, but to achieve a whole new living environment and life style,” noted one Florida economist.²¹¹

The April 1974 issue of AARP's *Modern Maturity* magazine featured a story on the development of the association's very own mobile-home park, Hawthorne at Leesburg in central Florida. Promoted as “another pioneering venture in AARP's long history of trail-blazing for retirees,” the park offered little in the way of real gerontological innovations, though it included older people in the planning process. The article high-lighted the middle-class respectability of the park and emphasized its many recreational activities, now common fare among popular retirement communities. “At Hawthorne, hobby rooms, saunas,

208. Richard Hayes, *How to Live Like a Retired Millionaire on Less than \$250 a Month: A Fascinating True Story of “Country Club” Living for Retired People of Modest Means* (Beverly Hills, CA: Trail-R-Club of America, 1962), 3.

209. Thomson, *Birds on a Banana Tree*, 163.

210. Thomas Collins, “Mobile Homes, What the Retired Get,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, Feb. 26, 1970.

211. Max Holt Strader, “A Cross-Section Analysis of the Demand for Mobile Homes in Florida,” (unpublished dissertation, Department of Economics, University of Florida, 1977), 40.

shuffleboard courts, a putting green, billiard room and library cater to the ... needs of residents,” *Modern Maturity* reported. “In addition, a wide variety of courses is available at Leesburg’s Lake-Sumter Community College.” Colorful pictures showed neatly furnished mobile homes with residents engaged in boating, golfing, and gardening.²¹²

In 1970 the typical trailer measured twelve by sixty feet and was encased in metal siding. It had two bedrooms, a living room, kitchenette, and bathroom and came complete with built-in furniture, decorative paneling, and wall-to-wall carpeting. A new, mid-range mobile home cost approximately \$5,000. Used trailers sold for significantly less. Compared with conventional houses, the tax and licensing fees for trailers were low. Mobile home dwellers also paid roughly \$40 a month to rent their lots and cover the costs of park services and upkeep.²¹³

Mobile home communities often offered age-segregated settings. Some served retirees exclusively. Others catered to working families with children.²¹⁴ The typical mobile home owner was distinguished by age and income. Those under thirty-five composed forty-three percent of the mobile home market, while retirees made up an impressive twenty-five percent of purchasers. Both groups belonged to America’s lower-than-average income groups – with incomes below \$10,000 a year in 1970. Construction workers and skilled tradesmen composed the ranks of typical young-adult owners. Older mobile home residents, meanwhile, included retirees from a variety of backgrounds.²¹⁵

212. “New Concept in Retirement Living,” *Modern Maturity* (April/May 1974), 52-53.

213. Jack Bryan, “The Mobile Home Grows Up,” *Housing Yearbook* (NY: Abco Press, National Housing Conference Inc, 1970), 51; Myrna Smith, “How About Mobile Home Living?,” *Modern Maturity* (Aug/Sept 1970), 18; Collins, “Mobile Homes,” B24; Strader, “A Cross-Section Analysis,” 40.

214. Hayes, 40.

215. “Idle Haven,” 26; Collins, “Mobile Homes,” B24; Bryan, “The Mobile Home Grows Up,” 51; Strader, “A Cross-Section Analysis,” 52-54, 132.

The modern mobile home which sat immobile for long periods of time had its origins as an automobile trailer. In the 1920s these simple ten-by-twelve-foot accommodations gained popularity as a means of convenient and economical vacation travel. They provided self-contained sleeping and cooking space, thus eliminating the need to camp outside or to pay for room and board.²¹⁶ In succeeding decades thousands of retirees took to the open road, trailer in tow. “Even a superficial glance at the trailer movement shows a large proportion of the old folks in its ranks,” reported Donald Cowgill, a doctoral student who explored trailer life through participant observation. Traveling from park to park in 1941, Cowgill noted that the trailer holiday suited older couples particularly well. The vacation was economical and sociable. It provided the opportunity to leave worries behind, to explore new places, and to meet new people. Cowgill's dissertation included numerous case studies of “trailerites.” Among them was a sixty-three-year-old retired teacher from Florida. “A trailer is fine for seeing our country economically,” the interviewee reported. “One gets the food he is accustomed to, meets many retired people ... and he always knows whose chin the blankets were pulled up under the night before.”²¹⁷

The Great Depression and the Second World War spurred the adaption of trailers as an inexpensive form of housing. During the 1930s trailer parks accommodated increasing numbers of financially strapped workers and retirees who used their trailers for year-round housing instead of travel. In 1939 roughly ten percent of new trailers were purchased as permanent dwellings. Over the next few years the number of trailers used in this manner exploded. By the early 1940s, nineteen percent of trailers were manufactured and purchased

216. Barnet Hodes and G. Gale Roberson, *The Law of Mobile Homes*, (Commerce Clearing House, Inc, 1954), 1.

217. Donald Olen Cowgill, “Mobile Homes: A Study of Trailer Life,” (Unpublished dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, 1941), 8-9, 14-15, 22, 27.

for permanent housing.²¹⁸ The war effort further contributed to this trend as the government purchased 38,000 trailers to house military personnel and defense workers. Many more were purchased privately. When American troops returned from service overseas, they faced a severe housing shortage. Trailer camps soon sprouted up across the country and manufacturers created more spacious, well-appointed homes to meet the needs of veterans and their families. By the time the housing crisis ended, the trailer (re-christened the “mobile home” by marketers) had become an established form of permanent housing.²¹⁹

Warm weather, open land, and rapid population growth made mobile homes particularly popular throughout the south and southwest, especially in Florida. By the mid-1970s trailer ownership was two-and-a-quarter times greater in Florida than the rest of the country. More than seventeen percent of the population lived in trailers and older citizens represented a substantial forty percent of the state's mobile home market.²²⁰

Mobile home communities that catered to retirees prospered in Florida as early as the 1950s. A local Kiwanis Club founded one of the first, Bradenton Park, in 1936. Originally offering 100 trailer spaces, the community grew to include nearly 2,000 lots by 1954. That year residents rented lots for \$4.00 a week. This cost included use of communal laundry facilities, basic electrical and water service, and participation in social events. Retirees intermingled on Bradenton's shuffleboard and horseshoe courts. They gathered for group sing-a-longs and story telling and participated in Bible classes, hobby clubs, and bingo games. Such camaraderie appealed to Bradenton's residents. Social programming set their

218. Hodes and Roberson, *The Law of Mobile Homes*, 1; Allan D. Wallis, *Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 64-65, 70.

219. Hodes and Roberson, *The Law of Mobile Homes*, 2; Wallis, *Wheel Estate*, 93-104, 134.

220. Wallis, *Wheel Estate*, 133, 164-8, 171; Bryan, “The Mobile Home,” 54; Strader, “A Cross-Section Analysis,” 41, 43, 45, 54, 56, 133; *Governor's Task Force on Mobile Homes* (Tallahassee, FL: March, 1974), 1-2.

park apart from Florida's mix-aged mobile home communities and provided the formula for the thousands of retiree parks that followed throughout the state and across the country.²²¹

Trailer Estates in Florida's Manatee County offered another innovative retirement community. Created in 1955 by Syd Adler, a young attorney intrigued by the growing numbers of snowbirds in Florida,²²² Trailer Estates was the first to allow residents to purchase both their mobile home and the lot that it sat on. The ability to own land appealed to retired migrants who wanted to exchange their large northern and mid-western homes for smaller, more manageable southern abodes, but who did not want to forfeit the pride of home ownership. Florida law deemed a mobile home situated on a rented lot "personal property." Ownership of a trailer and the tract of land on which it sat constituted "real estate property." By the close of 1955, seniors had snapped up 250 lots in Trailer Estates. Three years later the majority of the development's 1,451 lots had been sold for prices ranging from \$1,300 to \$4,500. Building on the success of this first venture, Adler created similar communities in Sarasota, Florida as well as Palm Springs, California and Tuscon, Arizona.²²³

When asked about their housing selection, most retired mobile home owners described income constraints as one important consideration.²²⁴ In 1972, the average Florida home cost nearly \$30,000, an amount many could not afford.²²⁵ Trailer park retirees

221. G.C. Hoyt, "The Life of the Retired in a Trailer Park," *American Journal of Sociology* (January 1954), 362-365; *Facts About Florida's Older Population* (Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State Improvement Commission, 1953), 9.

222. "Snowbirds" is a term commonly used to describe retirees who move seasonally between residences in the Northeast or North Central United States and the warmer climates of the American South and Southwest.

223. Allan Feldt, et al., "Retirement Subdivisions, Trailer Estates, Manatee County, Florida," *Journal of Housing for the Elderly* (Winter 1983), 155,158-160. Despite the success of Trailer Estates, the rental of trailer plots remained the norm in most mobile home communities. This was likely due to the initial added expenses associated with the purchase rather than the rental of a lot.

224. Strader, "A Cross-Section Analysis ," 132.

225. "Governor's Task Force on Mobile Homes," 76.

appreciated more than their communities' inexpensive price tag, however. Richard Hayes's "Two Hundred Dollar a Month" complex and the thousands of parks like it may not have boasted the most impressive addresses, but they did offer some of the same amenities as Florida's more exclusive retirement villages. Retirees enjoyed using their communities' swimming pools, shuffleboard courts, and fishing piers. Like East Ridge inhabitants, moreover, mobile home retirees welcomed the opportunity to mingle among friends and neighbors of their own generation. In a 1954 study of Brandeton Trailer Park, eighty-eight percent of residents said that they preferred living in a community "where everyone is retired" rather than in neighborhood composed mostly of working people. Brandenton seemed quieter and safer than a mixed-age neighborhood. Brandenton's occupants understood and helped one another, the interviewees insisted. "We are all in the same boat," explained one resident. "A retired person just doesn't fit in a working community, but here everybody cooperates to have a good time."²²⁶

Mobile home retirement parks – like pricier retirement villages - brought older people together, but they also fenced African Americans out. A 1971 anthropological study of Idle Haven retirement park in Santa Rosa, California revealed how racism fueled the selection of a retirement community. Many Idle Haven retirees had relocated from the nearby working-class communities of Oakland, California which experienced a steady influx of black residents during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Tucked behind a six-foot high security fence with a sign warning, "Private Property, Permission to Pass Revocable at Any Time," Idle Haven residents felt snug among a sea of white neighbors who supposedly shared similar values and experiences. The park's unwritten rules provided further peace of mind. "Perhaps the chief advantage that mobile home residents perceive in park regulations is their covert

226. "Life in a Retired Trailer Park," 366-367.

exclusion of Negroes,” reported the study. “There was little doubt that racial discrimination by mobile home park owners and managers is virtually universal and that this is the main reason why less than two percent of the national mobile-home population is black ... Such discriminatory practices are extremely popular with mobile home park residents and racial fears are a major reason why some people move into mobile home parks.”²²⁷

These observations rang true in Florida, where mobile home owners comprised a higher percentage of white residents than the state's conventional home owners. Racial discrimination in Dade County trailer parks remained uncontested until 1979 when Lois Brock, a retired equal-opportunity counselor for the U.S. Army filed a complaint against the Riviera Mobile Home Park. While making plans to move to Miami, Brock spoke by telephone with a Riviera receptionist who assured her that the park had space for her brand new trailer. When Brock arrived in person, however, the receptionist and the owner claimed that the mobile home would not fit any of the vacant lots. The Metro Fair Housing and Employment Appeals Board found the Riviera guilty of racial discrimination. The management “has done a very, very good job of keeping the park all-white for a number of years,” commented the board, which ordered the Riviera to pay Brock \$5,000 for the humiliation she suffered.²²⁸

While trailer communities excluded African Americans, mobile home owners also faced discrimination. Traditional home owners worried that trailer parks and the supposedly “transient” characters who inhabited them would compromise their community's moral tone and lower property values. Laws often prohibited the placement of mobile homes on private

227. Shelia K. Johnson, *Idle Haven: Community Building Among the Working-Class Retired* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 15, 50.

228. Eston Melton, “Trailer Park Guilty of Racial Bias,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 6, 1979.

lots, restricting their use to licensed parks. Mobile home parks – even those catering to mild-mannered retirees – were frequently confined to less desirable neighborhoods. They overlooked industrial sections of towns and cities or sat isolated on metropolitan outskirts.²²⁹ These locations posed particular challenges to older residents, many of whom no longer drove their own cars and relied on public transportation. “Most mobile home parks are located outside city limits,” retirement writer Selina Thomas cautioned prospective buyers. “It must be a drag, to say the least to return home from a shopping spree and discover the fresh milk has gone sour waiting about in the heat for the return bus.”²³⁰

Community apprehension over trailer parks was, in some respects, well founded. Conventional houses generally appreciated over time. Mobile homes lost value quickly.²³¹ Park management often left much to be desired, particularly in metropolitan areas where the small number of locations zoned for mobile home use meant that park managers held a monopoly on available lots. Continuous complaints from trailer park dwellers in Dade, Broward, Manatee, and Pinellas counties spurred a series hearings directed by the Florida Department of Community Affairs in 1970. In hearing rooms filled to capacity residents vented their frustration over their parks' petty rules and regulations, the abuses of management, and the lack of reliable maintenance.²³² Mobile homes parks, moreover, were not subject to federal building or licensing laws, and enforcement of state regulations left

229. Strader, “A Cross-Section Analysis,” 52, 139; Wallis, *Wheel Estate*, 178-179; *Report*, 76; Bryan, “The Mobile Home Grows Up,” 54; Hodes and Roberson, *The Law of Mobile Homes*, 6, 36.

230. Thomson, *Birds on a Banana Tree*, 178.

231. Strader, “A Cross-Section Analysis,” 37.

232. *State of Florida Council on Community Affairs: Hearings on Mobile Home Park Operations in Florida* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Council on Community Affairs, 1970), 1-16; Hodes and Roberson, *The Law of Mobile Homes*, 6-7, 9-10; *Report*, opening letter.

much to be desired.²³³ A 1974 Governor's Task Force on Mobile Homes denounced the frequent sale of trailers which did not meet Florida's building code. The task force called for improved enforcement of construction standards and the introduction of a labeling system to ensure quality.²³⁴

Over the Turnpike and Through the High Rises: Retirees as Urban Dwellers

Despite the popularity of mobile home parks and retirement villages, these often secluded hideaways did not entice every retiree. Many longed for retirement in the heart of a thriving metropolis. We often imagine older Americans as tradition-bound country dwellers who stayed home on the farm while younger generations sought opportunities in towns and cities. Fewer and fewer grandparents lived “over the river and through the woods” by the mid-twentieth-century, however. In 1950 sixty-four percent of Americans aged sixty five and over called metropolitan locations home. By 1960 that figure jumped to seventy percent and by 1970 it reached seventy-five percent.²³⁵

Many older city dwellers favored condominiums – buildings in which residents purchased both an apartment and joint-ownership of common areas such as the surrounding grounds, swimming pool, and parking lot. A new post-war housing option, condominiums first gained popularity in Florida and California resort communities and retirees soon

233. In 1978 the government finally required mobile-homes manufacturers to meet federal safety standards. See: Sylvia Porter, “Federal Mobile-Home Standards On Safety Go in Effect Tuesday,” *Miami Herald*, June 11, 1978.

234. *Governor's Task Force on Mobile Homes*, 8.

235. Elliot D. Sclar, “Aging and Residential Location,” in Robert J. Newcomer and Thomas O. Byerts, eds., *Community Planning for an Aging Society: Designing Services and Facilities* (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc, 1976), 266; R.B. Andrews, “Housing the Elderly,” 113-214.

gravitated toward these facilities.²³⁶ By 1963 older people comprised seventy-four percent of condominium purchasers in Florida. The condominium provided retirees with an opportunity to settle in exclusive (often water-front) urban settings where expensive single family homes remained beyond their means.²³⁷ Condominium apartments also required less upkeep than the average home. A professional staff – hired jointly by the owners - completed building and grounds maintenance chores. Finally, condominium residents enjoyed some control over the composition of their community. They could restrict ownership of apartments for sale in their building through an applicant screening process – a perceived advantage to many retirees seeking an all-white and child-free “haven” in a busy South Florida city.²³⁸

In 1963 the Florida Hotel and Restaurant Commission described the condominium as a “New Frontier of Retirement Living” and one that dramatically altered the state's urban spaces. “A glimpse of the beautiful skyline of many South Florida cities compared with that of five years ago graphically reflects the trend in living habits of Florida's residents,” the Commission reported. “High rise apartment buildings are challenging towering hotels and office buildings as they raise their penthouses high into the azure sky amid glittering cloaks of metal or glass with a modern flair.”²³⁹ Miami's 100 Building Tower offers one example of

236. *Profile of Metropolitan Dade County: Conditions and Needs* (Miami: Metropolitan Dade Co. Community Improvement Program, 1972), 2, 32.

237. In 1963 a condominium apartment in Florida cost between \$7000 and \$140,000 depending on a variety of factors: location, size, amenities. The mean price was \$23,031.98. Condominium owners also paid a building maintenance and administration fee at an average cost of \$86.21 a month. See Gordon McGraw, *Cooperative and Condominium Apartments: The New Frontier in Retirement Living* (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Hotel and Restaurant Commission, September 1963), 5.

238. Brown L. Whatley, “Condominium in Florida: Will it Cause a Real Estate Revolution?” *Florida Trend* (September 1962), 20-21; Joel Madelbaum, “A ‘Money Machine’ Attracts Investors,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1973; Gordon McGraw, *Cooperative and Condominium Apartments*, 3-7; Charles Kimball, “Condominium Sales Pace Up,” *Miami Herald*, Aug 30, 1978.

239. Gordon McGraw, *Cooperative and Condominium Apartments*, 1. The Metropolitan Dade County Community Improvement Program also noted the dramatic changes to South Florida's skyline. The program described the condominium's creation of ‘canyon’ of developments in downtown Miami and Miami Beach. See:

the many advantages that lured older residents to these chic, urban abodes. The building's city location appealed to Mrs. Hazel Brown, a widow who exchanged her home in the leafy suburbs for an efficiency at the Tower. "After my husband died, I couldn't stand the quiet out in Coral Gables," she explained in a 1967 *Miami Herald* story about senior city dwellers. Neighbors included Mrs. Richard Buracker and Mrs. Roxy Cagle -- older women who, like Brown, relished urban living. They enjoyed the panoramic city view from their balconies, the convenience of their central location, as well as the chance to participate in the hubbub of their environs. They could walk to the market, bank, and pharmacy. They could easily take in a movie or visit the library. Unlike the residents of retirement villages, these older city dwellers lived among a wide variety of people engaged in a world of activities. Their neighborhood was filled with school children on field trips, construction workers perched high upon steel girders, and businessmen rushing to work.²⁴⁰

Retirees who appreciated the convenience and excitement of downtown living but who could not afford to purchase a condominium or to rent a more modest apartment often made do in a retirement hotel where room and board rates remained reasonable.²⁴¹ "A good feature is [the building's] location," reported one guest. "It is convenient to the post office, food and clothing stores, and to transportation to other business areas. It is near churches and the auditorium where many activities take place."²⁴² A 1968 questionnaire completed by

Profile of Metropolitan Dade County, 32.

240. Beverley Wilson, "Downtown? It's the Only Place They Want to Be," *Miami Herald*, June 2, 1967.

241. According to a 1969 sociological study, a shared room in a Florida retirement hotel cost between \$90 and \$250 a month for a shared room and between \$135 and \$500 a month for a single room. These prices included full use of hotel facilities as well as three meals a day. See: Ruth Albrecht, "Retirement Hotels in Florida," in Carter C. Osterbind, ed., *Feasible Planning for Social Change in the Field of Aging*, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1969), 76.

242. Royal Mattice, *Florida Retirement Hotels: Functions, Services and Relations* (Tallahassee, Florida: Commission on Aging and Florida State University, 1968), 46.

retirement hotel residents from across Florida, echoed this sentiment. Eighty-eight percent of respondents described their hotel's location as satisfactory or excellent.²⁴³

Census studies conducted by Miami's Community Renewal Program revealed that a growing number of older people occupied the city center. 1,583 residents ages sixty-five and over lived downtown in 1960. By 1965 that number rose to 2,000. Such numbers are notable because housing options for those on fixed-incomes had declined significantly in central city neighborhoods. Urban renewal resulted in the demolition of numerous older rooming houses, hotels, and private dwellings. Low-income housing was also removed to make way for an expressway that cut through the heart of the city in the mid-1960s.²⁴⁴

Neighborhood redevelopment posed particular disadvantages for Miami's older residents. Up-and-coming zip codes experienced rent and tax hikes that squeezed retirees on fixed incomes. Tenants who occupied older buildings worried about dislocation. What would they do should the city decide to raze their living quarters to make space grand hotels, shopping centers, and parking decks?²⁴⁵ In declining neighborhoods, meanwhile, crime rates kept retirees on edge and prevented some seniors from leaving home for all but the most necessary journeys. At the Aloha Retirement Residence on Biscayne Boulevard, two security guards provided some peace of mind, but residents rarely strayed far from the building. The retirement home had been recently converted from an adult motel and was located in a community notorious for crime and prostitution. Seventy-one year old resident Mildred Gray, who rented adjoining rooms at the Aloha with her ninety-seven year old mother and seventy-

243. Albrecht, "Retirement Hotels," 77.

244. Wilson, "Downtown?"

245. Jon Nordheimer, "Florida Seeks to Curb Runaway Growth," *New York Times*, Nov. 19, 1973; J. Ronnie Davis, "Economic Effects of Growth Policy on Older People," in Carter C. Osterbind, ed., *Migration, Mobility, and Aging: A Report on the 23rd Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Center for Gerontological Studies and Programs, 1974), 109-110; Jones et al., *A Report on Services*, 1-2.

eight year old aunt, told a Miami reporter how she handled life in a dangerous neighborhood: “If you want to get into trouble, you go out and look for it. If you don’t, you stay home.”²⁴⁶

Old Age Gold-Mines Lose Their Shine: Life Inside Miami’s Retirement Hotels

The changing cityscape spelled trouble not only for retirees, but for many of the businesses that served them. Once labeled “old age gold mines” by the Miami press, Florida’s retirement hotels suffered financial setbacks in the late 1960s and 1970s. These hotels were often located in transitional neighborhoods. Purchased inexpensively in the 1950s and early 1960s, booming land and real estate values forced a number of retirement hotel owners out of business a decade later. In 1958 thirty-five retirement hotels graced the street fronts of Miami, Miami Beach, St. Petersburg, and other Florida cities. By 1968 thirteen had closed their doors. “With one-hundred percent valuation for ad valorem real estate taxes now the law in Florida, it is not surprising that a number of operators have left the field due to the inability to stay in business with costs increasing more rapidly than revenues,” explained the Florida Commission on Aging. Unlike retirement homes sponsored by churches and other non-profit groups, for-profit retirement hotels did not receive tax exempt status.²⁴⁷ Inflation further reduced profits. Rising grocery prices proved particularly problematic as retirement hotel rates included the provision of three full meals a day. While most retirement hotels had been purchased on the cheap, moreover, the upkeep of these older buildings was costly. The hotels’ crumbling plaster and creaking pipes necessitated plenty of penny pinching. Rising

246. David Holmberg, “Old Now Gold at the Aloha, Where Sin was Once In,” *Miami News*, Feb 16, 1978. Other elderly Miami residents expressed similar fears about venturing out in their crime-ridden neighborhoods. See: Margery Keasler, “And So Starts A New Life in New Digs,” *Miami News*, Dec. 13, 1964; Barry Bearak and Christopher Cubbison, “Teen Sought in Death of Elderly Blind Man,” *Miami Herald*, May 23, 1976.

247. Royal Mattice, *Florida Retirement Hotels*, 1-4, 7, 12, 42, 87.

real estate costs, meanwhile, precluded the possibility of constructing new buildings.²⁴⁸

When retirement hotels faced financial woes, the residents of these decidedly no-frills establishments endured further cutbacks in service. The owners' inability to pay decent wages resulted in continuous employee turnover. Health and safety inspectors frequently cited overfilled garbage bins, peeling paint, and building disrepair. Owners also skimmed on food quality, quantity, and variety. "Due to a low budget in most hotels, it is impossible to afford top grade food supplies or very experienced cooks," reported the Commission on Aging. "In some cases, the managers are [also]the cooks." "The weak spots [of this retirement hotel] are the food and the service," commented one guest. "There is no choice at lunch or dinner. You take it or leave it ... The caliber of the dining room help is not high... Room service is only fair." "My first year of residence was mostly satisfactory. Then the management changed. Since then everything has deteriorated to a pitiful degree," complained another resident. "The food is of the cheapest quality, poorly cooked, badly served (waiters leaving every day or so). Portions are very small, mostly canned goods."²⁴⁹

A lack of uniform standards – especially those which promoted the comfort and safety of older guests – further exacerbated the situation. Florida's Hotel and Restaurant Commission inspected and licensed the state's retirement hotels. While it worked to ensure basic sanitation, ventilation, and building codes, the commission did not consider the special dietary, health, and safety needs of elderly residents.²⁵⁰ Unlike in many retirement villages, geriatric innovations such as grab bars, wide and easy open doors, and panic buttons were largely absent from retirement hotels' old and sometimes dilapidated buildings. Even basic

248. Ibid., 2-3, 7-8.

249. Ibid., 12, 26-27, 46-48.

250. Bella Kelly, "Hotels for Aged in Probe Glare"; Robert Riedel, *Retirement Housing Survey*, (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Hotel and Restaurant Commission, 1962), 26; Mattice, *Florida Retirement Hotels*, 40.

modern conveniences such as elevators in these multi-story buildings were often in disrepair – a problem that posed more than a nuisance to frail residents who had trouble climbing stairs. Fire safety standards were also negligible. Outdated electrical systems, unmarked exits, and a noted resistance to fire drills worried fire inspectors.²⁵¹ In 1967 they condemned and closed down three retirement hotels due to serious fire code violations.²⁵²

Retirement hotel managers were not required to receive geriatric training and most had little experience working with older people. In a 1969 survey by the University of Florida, the state's retirement hotel managers reported a variety of occupational backgrounds including legal, retail, and clerical work.²⁵³ It would be beneficial for the managers to “have additional faculty for dealing with and understanding the problems inevitably associated with and peculiar to the persons who have reached retirement age,” admitted the Florida Hotel and Restaurant Commission. “[But], in many cases... [they] gave every indication of being untrained, uninterested and in some cases most inept. There were hotels surveyed that had managers with no background for the position held and no apparent interest in the retiree beyond just holding his or her job.”²⁵⁴

Though management cared little about their clients' seniority, it was the camaraderie of age and social background that prevented many guests from relocating after reductions in hotel service and quality. Like the residents of age-restricted retirement villages, mobile home parks, and condominiums, most hotel tenants enjoyed living among members of their

251. Most retirement hotels did not have a fire safety plan in place, did not post fire-safety instructions, and did not practice fire drills. Retirement hotel operators resisted fire drills which they argued made residents feel nervous and insecure. See Mattice, *Florida Retirement Housing Survey*, 13.

252. Ibid., 8, 13-14, 39-40.

253. Albrecht, “Retirement Hotels,” 72-73.

254. Riedel, *Retirement Housing Survey*, 6.

own generation. "I find when I go North [to visit] young relatives, they are always too solicitous," reported one guest. "Here, old age is just accepted as normal and I've decided it is better to belong to one's own age group."²⁵⁵ "I've been a widower for twenty-one years. I operated a laundry up in New York until three years ago when I had a heart attack, explained another resident. "The doctor advised Florida and since I had children here, I came to Miami, moved in with my daughter for a few weeks. But the kids went to school, my daughter went out shopping. I was looking at four walls and I was lonesome. So I checked in at a retirement hotel on a month's trial basis... It was wonderful. [I found] people of my age and with the same interests. I found... companionship... I felt like a new person... I share a room with a seventy-eight-year-old man from Philadelphia. We're brothers. I take him to my daughter's home and my grandchildren consider him another grandpa. I feel good and hope I live to be 100."²⁵⁶

Residents also preferred associating with individuals of similar ethnic and religious backgrounds. In 1966 Burt Garnett, a seventy-eight-year-old journalist with the *Miami News*, conducted a series of undercover investigations on retirement hotels. His introductory report highlighted the importance of cultural heritage to many retirement hotel guests. During the journey to his first hotel, Garnett asked his cab driver about the residents of such establishments. "I know a lot about them. Not rich people, but nice, good people. Mostly old people," replied the driver. "I mentioned the name of a retirement hotel and asked him if he thought I would like it there," explained Garnett. "He looked at me and said, 'Well, you're a Gentile, aren't you?' I said I was. 'I'm a Jew,' he said. 'And this hotel you're asking about is almost entirely a Jewish place. I don't know if you'd like it.' 'Well,' I said, 'do you think

255. Mattice, *Florida Retirement Hotels*, 47.

256. Sanford Schnier, "What Miami's Doing for the Ill-Housed Aged," *Miami News*, Nov 23, 1959.

they'd object to me because I'm a Gentile?' He seemed a little hesitant about answering, but nodded and said, 'Well, some of them might. They're old and some of them hardly talk any English. And they're kind of set in their ways.' He then suggested some of the other hotels, saying 'they might be better for you.'²⁵⁷ Both Jewish and gentile hotels served an almost exclusively white clientèle. A 1961 study revealed that all Miami Beach retirement hotel residents were white, an important benefit in the minds of many guests.²⁵⁸ "My only comment is, this is a lovely place but please don't ever integrate it," implored one resident. "You would have a vacant hotel if you did – and that would be a great pity, as most of us love it here."²⁵⁹

While some guests may have considered leaving when services faltered or new residents threatened the established culture, many simply could not afford to move. Most made do with modest service and appreciated the inexpensive price tag. "My opinion is that we get what we pay for, and most of us are glad to stay in these hotels," noted one resident. "With a few exceptions, most of us are living on the sale of our houses, some insurance, perhaps a small bank account, and Social Security so this type of giant boarding house is the ideal solution."²⁶⁰ "I have no income," reported another guest. "I go to see a doctor once per month for high blood pressure... I go to church each Sunday. I live a plain, simple life. I have no one but the hotel..."²⁶¹ Odd jobs around the hotel helped some guests who struggled to make ends meet. "I run the news stand in the hotel, but [I'm] not making enough to live on,"

257. Garnett, *How to Retire to Florida*, 79.

258. Dade County Florida Health Department, *Residents of Retirement Hotels in Miami Beach* (Miami, FL: Dade County Florida Health Department, 1961), 3.

259. Mattice, *Florida Retirement Hotels*, 49.

260. *Ibid.*, 51.

261. *Ibid.*, 50.

worried one resident. “I have no income except Social Security.”²⁶²

I Cannot Live on Bread and Potatoes Alone: Public Housing for Seniors

Residents no longer able to afford a room at the Boulevard, the Blackstone, or one of Dade County's other retirement hotels, joined the ranks of the ill-housed poor. Many retirees lured to Florida by the promise of easy living on a shoestring budget soon discovered that medical bills, inflation, and a booming real estate market quickly depleted Social Security checks and savings accounts.²⁶³ Thousands of Miami seniors struggled to pay their rent or mortgages. Some watched their once tidy abodes fall into disrepair as ailing health and rising maintenance costs made upkeep all but impossible. “Although many advantages attract retired people to Dade, the ability of pensions to meet housing costs is no longer one of them,” noted a 1976 Miami housing study. “County officials, real estate ads, and tv commercials for new housing developments all agree – ‘property values in the area are skyrocketing.’ Pushed by demand for housing that keeps the vacancy rate hovering between one and three percent, purchase costs, taxes, and rents reach levels few pensions can match.”²⁶⁴ “The struggle for available living space is very intense,” agreed a 1974 report by the Dade County Office of Human Resources. “Housing costs are among the highest in the country. Therefore, for the most part, the elderly are forced to live in areas characterized by

262. Ibid., 48.

263. M.L. Kafoglis, “Economic Aspects of the Migration of Older People,” in Carter C. Osterbind ed., *Migration, Mobility and Aging* (Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 96; United States Senate, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources, United States Senate, 95th Congress, 1st Session on the Examination of Health Care Problems Encountered by the Elderly*, Nov. 9, 1977, *Miami, Florida* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 12, 19-25.

264. Jones et al., *A Report on Services*, 1-2.

substandard and inadequate housing.”²⁶⁵

Throughout the mid-to-late-twentieth-century, growing and disproportionate numbers of older citizens filled South Florida's dingy boarding homes and shanties.²⁶⁶ Among them, a seventy-two year old farmer's widow who in 1959 inhabited a lean-to erected next to tomato fields in Homestead, Florida. The shack sat on uneven ground, causing “the drip pan under the ice box” to “run over every day.” An applicant for residency in Miami's Donn Gardens public housing development, this woman longed “to live in a house what ain't a-leanin’” before she died.²⁶⁷ Another applicant occupied a grimy boarding room that had a toilet but no bath. When asked how she managed to keep clean, the sixty-seven year old widow responded that she “splashed here and there.”²⁶⁸

In November 1959, these women were but two on a long list of applicants seeking a place at Donn Gardens – a building still in the planning stages and the first public housing development in the Southeast designed exclusively for seniors. Prospective tenants bombarded Miami Housing Authority director Haley Sofge with desperate letters long before the city broke ground on the complex. “The response has been tremendous,” Sofge told reporters. “I'm only sorry that we won't be able to get them all in. Selections will be based on income, housing, and health needs.”²⁶⁹

265. Project In-Step, *Profile of the Elderly, Dade County, Florida* (Miami: Dade County Office of Human Resources, 1974), ii.

266. In 1964 those sixty-five and over composed thirty-four percent of residents in Dade County's more than 30,000 substandard housing units. Domiciles were deemed “sub-standard” if they were dilapidated or if they lacked hot running water, an inside bath or shower, or a flush toilet. See: Fred Fogarty, “High-Rise Lifts Hopes of Elderly,” *Miami Herald*, March 23, 1964.

267. Schnier, “What Miami's Doing.”

268. Ibid.

269. Ibid.

Completed in January 1961 the federally-financed, half-million dollar project included thirty-nine one-bedroom and twenty-five efficiency apartments which featured ramps instead of stairs, wide doors, non-slip floors, hand rails and seated tubs in the bathroom, low cabinets, and easy-to-reach electrical sockets. Rent started at \$25 a month, depending on the tenant's ability to pay. Donn Gardens' five-acre campus also included the Malcom Ross Senior Day Center. Open to all Dade County seniors, the center boasted an ample screened-in porch, a kitchen, and multiple meeting and recreation rooms.²⁷⁰

Donn Gardens' first residents took pride and pleasure in their new homes. "I cannot live on bread and potatoes alone. Sometimes I like a concert or a movie," explained Ida Goldstein to a group of public officials and reporters who toured her apartment during the building's dedication ceremony. Before moving to Donn Gardens Goldstein's small monthly income barely covered rent, utilities, and food. "Now I can pay the rent and have some left for payments on the furniture. I can have a telephone," she marveled. "This place is so beautiful I can shout from the rooftops for everyone to come and see. I'm living now – at seventy-two – that's when life begins."²⁷¹ Ninety-five year old resident Mary Chapin also appreciated her new surroundings. Chapin moved to Donn Gardens from a rickety three-room cottage within feet of a busy Miami highway. Her old home's \$40 rent absorbed more than two-thirds of her monthly income. At Donn Gardens Chapin paid \$25 a month for a bright efficiency apartment complete with a modern bathroom and brand new kitchen appliances. "At the end to have something like this ... This is the best thing that ever happened to me," Chapin told the *Miami Herald*. "This is going to be my last dwelling place

270. Sanford Schnier, "A Place Called Home for the Old Folks: Low-Rent Area Starts in Miami," *Miami News*, July 14, 1960; "Watching Florida Grow," *Miami News*, Sept. 30, 1960; Arthur Johnsey, "Donn Gardens 'Lease' Gives Aged New Life," *Miami Herald*, Jan. 16, 1961; "Project's Dedication is Sunday," *Miami Herald*, Jan. 12, 1961.

271. Johnsey, "Donn Gardens 'Lease'."

on earth. I'm going to stay for a long time now. I've got to reach that 100 mark. After all, I've just five more years to go.”²⁷²

The housing authority selected Goldstein and Chapin from among more than 400 applicants clamoring for one of Donn Gardens' sixty-four apartments. Many applicants inhabited Edison Court, Miami's older, mixed-age public housing development which had its own two-year waiting list. These residents felt lonely and isolated among a sea of younger people. They longed for recreation, companionship, and a sense of purpose, Sofge explained.²⁷³ Donn Gardens was created with these aims in mind. The campus's Malcolm Ross Senior Center fit the bill with its wide-ranging activities and programs. “Some people like to be alone and cooped up. But not us,” offered Donn Gardens' resident Else Justin. “My husband is on the membership committee of the excellent senior day center. He's got a spot ... in the small band here ... He loves to make people happy with music. I make dolls in arts and crafts classes so we can give them to the youngsters in foster homes for Christmas. We keep very active.”²⁷⁴ The Justin's neighbor, seventy-year-old Katherine Tuttle also enjoyed her new community. “I worked eighteen years in the Horn and Hardart automat commissary in New York. I get along alright, though it was lonesome when I lost my husband,” Tuttle explained. Residency at Donn Gardens provided the widow with plenty of companionship through past times such as dancing, arts and crafts, and bingo. “I'm a pretty good pinochle player, too,” she noted. “We play for fun and I have lots of friends. If they don't see me at ten A.M. they come around to check and see if I'm alright. I walk to the Lutheran church every Sunday and I cook for myself and my friends when I feel like it, or eat lunch at the day

272. Marcie Ersoff, “Mary Chapin Begins a 'New Life' at 95,” *Miami Herald*, Jan. 14, 1961.

273. Schnier, “What Miami's Doing.”

274. Sanford Schnier, “A Residence Godsend in Golden Years,” *Miami News*, Oct. 19, 1961.

center.”²⁷⁵

Donn Gardens drew attention and praise from the federal government which credited the Miami Housing Authority for its leadership in elder care. During his visit to Donn Gardens U.S. Housing Authority Commissioner Bruce Savage declared the project a model for the kind of quality housing all older Americans deserved.²⁷⁶ Six months after Donn Gardens opened, the federal government allocated money for 621 additional low-income senior units in Miami. “We know there are great concentrations of older people in South Florida ... who need this type of housing,” noted one official. “We’re prepared to cooperate with the Miami Housing Authority on this problem.”²⁷⁷

Federal interest in housing low-income elders marked an important change in welfare policy. Before mid-century most public housing efforts focused on families with children. The United States Housing Act of 1937 (also known as the Wagner-Steagall Act) established the nation's first permanent public housing program.²⁷⁸ Although the legislation facilitated the building of safe and sanitary dwellings, it did not provide special provisions for older Americans. Local government officials who designed, located, and administered the federally-subsidized housing also overlooked the desperate need of elderly citizens. They relied on age-based quotas which favored young people and restricted the numbers of aged

275. Schnier, “A Residence Godsend.” For additional interviews with a number of content Donn Garden's residents, see: Margaret Warrington, “Strictly in Tune: Retired Minister Finds it Easy to Stay Busy at Donn Gardens,” *Miami News*, April 1, 1962.

276. Johnsey, “Donn Gardens 'Lease'.”

277. David Keaslow, “Low-Rent Housing Slated for Elderly,” *Miami Herald*, June 4, 1961.

278. For history of the Housing Act of 1937 see: Kenneth T. Jackson, *Grabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219-230; D. Bradford Hunt, “Was the U.S. 1937 Housing Act a Pyrrhic Victory?,” *Journal of Planning History* (Aug. 2005) 4:3, 195-221; Gail Radford, “The Federal Government and Housing During the Great Depression,” in John Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin Szylvian, eds, *From Tenement to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 102-120.

residents in public housing developments.²⁷⁹

During the 1950s older Americans' housing needs gained increasing local and national attention.²⁸⁰ In 1950 the first National Conference on Aging called for the creation of housing programs for seniors.²⁸¹ A year later in a speech before the National Housing Conference in Washington, D.C., the Public Housing Administration Commissioner described the “urgent” circumstances of the nation's ill-housed seniors.²⁸² By 1956 President Eisenhower was also contemplating the problem. “As the number of older people in our population has increased, action to meet their special housing needs has become highly important,” he declared in a budget message to Congress.²⁸³ Later that year Congress passed the Housing Act of 1956. This legislation included a provision that made public housing more accessible to older citizens and encouraged the creation of age-restricted dwellings with unique features for low-income adults aged sixty-two and over.²⁸⁴

279. Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, *Housing An Aging Population*, vii; R.B. Andrews, “Housing for the Elderly: Aspects of its Central Problem,” *Gerontologist* (Sept 1963) 3:3, 114; “The Public Housing Formula in Operation: Almost 900 Local Authorities Have Built Low-Rent Projects in 43 States,” *The Housing Yearbook, 1955* (Washington, D.C.: National Housing Conference, 1955), 49-50.

280. National Association of Housing and Redevelopment, “Introduction,” *Toward Good Housing for the Aged: Selected Articles from the Journal of Housing* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Housing and Redevelopment, 1956), i; “Housing for the Aged – Action Programs are Beginning to Take Shape,” *Toward Good Housing*, 2.

281. William Baer, “Federal Housing Programs for the Elderly,” in M. Powell Lawton, Robert J. Newcomer, and Thomas O. Byerts, eds, *Community Planning for an Aging Society: Designing Services and Facilities* (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc., 1976), 81.

282. “Housing for the Aged,” *Toward Good Housing*, 2.

283. *Ibid.*, 5.

284. The provision encouraged local administrators to give older applicants first preference for any units that met their special needs. When considering older applicants, administrators were also authorized to waive the requirement that tenants come from substandard housing. “Housing for the Aged,” *Toward Good Housing*, 1. Under the Public Housing Program, the federal government covered the cost of constructing public housing designed especially for seniors. It also provided local public housing administrations with subsidies for the day-to-day operation of these facilities. See: “Elderly Gaining Improved Homes,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1959; U.S. Department of Housing, *Housing for the Elderly and Handicapped: The Experience of the Section 202 Program from 1959 to 1977* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1979), 78.

The 1960s and 1970s heralded a nation-wide building boom in public housing for the aged.²⁸⁵ By 1968 forty-two Floridian communities included housing projects for seniors. In Dade County the elderly occupied forty-three percent of the local housing authority's 4,700 apartments and the community boasted six projects offering a total of 1,022 units built exclusively for older residents.²⁸⁶ By 1976 seniors occupied roughly half of the county's 9,254 public housing units and twenty-five of the Housing Authority's sixty public housing sites were designed and reserved for older adults.²⁸⁷

Building on the success of Donn Gardens, Miami continued to offer innovation housing solutions to some the area's neediest seniors. In 1964 the city constructed Robert King High Towers, the first public housing high-rise for older Americans in the Southeast and the largest of its kind in the nation. The thirteen-story, 322 efficiency-apartment building offered features similar to those available at Donn Gardens. Designers kept older residents in mind with the provision of ramps, wide doors, grab bars, non-slip tubs and heat lamps in bathrooms, and an emergency alarm in each residence. The Miami Housing Authority also highlighted the benefits of the Tower's central location. Seniors had easy access to the bus line, Jackson Memorial Hospital, and downtown shopping. Haley Sofge noted that most residents enjoyed their busy surroundings and that many applicants requested street-facing

285. By December, 1970, older Americans filled 331,000 – or nearly forty percent - of the nation's 850,000 public housing units. 160,000 of these units were designed and reserved especially for the elderly. United States Senate, *Adequacy of Federal Response to Housing Needs of Older Americans, Hearings before the Subcommittee on Housing of the Elderly of the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, Part III* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 117. See also: "Housing Boom for the Elderly," 42-3; Newcomer, "Meeting the Housing Needs," 64; Robert Gillan, "Zoning for the Elderly," in M. Powell Lawton, Robert Newcomer, and Thomas Byerts, eds., *Community Planning for an Aging Society: Designing Services and Facilities* (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson, and Ross, Inc., 1976), 100, 104.

286. Bess Marder, "Realities of a Community Service Program in Public Housing," in O. Bruce Thomason, ed., *Potentialities for Later Living: A Report on the Seventeenth Annual Southern Conference of Gerontology* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968), 97.

287. Jones et.al., *A Report on Services*, 3.

apartments because they liked “being a part of the stream of life.” A large senior center connected to the high-rise by a covered walkway encouraged further community participation. Residents enjoyed the facility's craft rooms, meeting hall, and library. They participated in health, education, and hot-meal programs sponsored by the center. The Towers' ten acre, river-front campus provided additional recreation with a walking trail, shuffleboard court, and putting green.²⁸⁸

The complex quickly gained national recognition for its ability to meet elderly residents' physical and social needs. U.S. Commissioner of Public Housing Marie McGuire commended Miami for its leadership in the field of public housing and described Robert King High Towers as “evidence that the nation is in the process of becoming a Great Society.” Congressman Claude Pepper hailed the high rise as a “victory for humanity.” *Nation's Cities* magazine featured the Towers in an article complete with color photographs and a headline touting: “Retirement housing in Miami shows what government can do.”²⁸⁹

Four years later Miami's George Smathers Plaza garnered similar accolades. This second public high-rise for city seniors offered the same amenities as Robert King High Towers and earned major architectural awards for its form and function. The *New York Times* described the project as “one of the best public housing developments for the aged yet built in this country,” and noted the delight of the building's new tenants. “It's a steal,” beamed twelfth-floor resident Mr. McBurney. “Where else on an income of slightly over \$80 a month

288. “Housing for Elderly Along Miami River,” *Miami Herald*, June 16, 1963; Morton Lucoff, “Housing for Elderly Near,” *Miami News*, July 28, 1963; Fred Fogarty, “High-Rise Lifts Hopes;” Jack Kassewitz, “Seniors Get Housing Break,” *Miami News*, April 21, 1964; Dick Nellius, “High-Rise Haven Caters to Elderly of Miami,” *Miami News*, Nov. 20, 1964; “High's Rise,” *Miami Herald*, Dec. 4, 1964; “Elderly Apartment Named for Mayor,” *Miami News*, Dec. 13, 1964; “And So Starts a New Life in New Digs;” Harry Rape, “Officialdom Hails Our High Towers,” *Miami Herald*, March 22, 1965; George Newman, “Dignity, Convenience, Beauty: Retirement Housing in Miami Shows What Government Can Do,” *Nation's Cities*, Dec. 1965; Jones et al., *A Report on Services*, 7.

289. Rape, “Officialdom Hails;” Newman, “Dignity, Convenience, Beauty.”

could I get a corner apartment with such a splendid view?”²⁹⁰

Mr. McBurney and his neighbors – who paid an average of \$30 dollars a month to reside in comfortable efficiencies at George Smathers Towers - counted themselves among the fortunate few. Despite Miami's reputation as an innovator in senior public housing, thousands of Dade County elders continued to live in over-priced and dilapidated cottages, boarding houses, and apartment buildings. “Would you please inform me if there is any space in federal low-rent houses in Dade or Broward Counties?” requested John Stewart in one of the thousands of inquires written to Senator George Smathers, Congressman Claude Pepper, and Haley Sofge throughout the 1960s and 1970s. “I rent a one room with a kitchenette for \$75 per month, but I only pay \$50 per month because I cut the grass and do other homes to make up the difference. I would like to give up pushing that lawn mower. I am now seventy-one years old and it takes it out of me, but I can't afford to give it up. My wife is crippled with arthritis and can only get around with the aid of sticks. Our total assets are nil. We only have our Social Security. Medicines have taken away our savings, but we could manage if we could get a lower rent.”²⁹¹

Stewart and his wife would have to wait a number of years for a space in public housing, if they secured one at all. Applicants waited an average of five years for an efficiency at Robert King High Towers, George Smathers Plaza, and other low-rent government properties. The list of applicants for senior public housing soared from 2,000 in 1966 to 9,000 a decade later.²⁹² By the mid-1970s the 6,000 elderly residents of Dade County

290. “High-Rise Suites for Elderly Grace Broad Plaza in Miami,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1968.

291. John W. Stewart, Letter to Senator George Smathers, July 9, 1964, “Housing and Home Finance Agency (1964)” file, George A. Smathers' Papers.

292. Steve Rogers, “City Plans 700 Units for Elderly,” *Miami Herald*, Sept. 8, 1966; House of Representatives, *The Need for Health and Social Services in Elderly Housing, Joint Hearing Before the Select Committee on Aging and Subcommittee on Housing and Consumer Interests of the Select Committee on Aging* (Washington,

public housing composed just eleven percent of the area's 53,000 low-income seniors. The remaining "48,000 are forced to live wherever they can regardless of quality of housing available," concluded the Dade County Office of Human Resources, which described the community's public housing program as "inadequate and unable to meet the needs of the older citizen."²⁹³ In 1976 10,500 Dade County elders resided in deficient living quarters, 11,442 endured overcrowded conditions, and 36,780 seniors spent more than a quarter of their income on housing.²⁹⁴

Sun, Sand, and Slum Clearance: Community Opposition to Senior Public Housing

Despite a glaring need, the Miami Housing Authority faced ongoing neighborhood opposition to public housing projects for seniors. A seven year battle ensued after the city revealed plans to build George Smathers Plaza. A large group of neighborhood residents fought the project which they worried would lower property values. They filled Miami Planning Board and City Commission meetings in numerous attempts to change zoning regulations and halt development of the project.²⁹⁵ Robert High King Towers also raised hackles. "The entire community of Grove Park, consisting of 150 families and the community of Lawrence Park consisting of at least 150 families, as well as some 500 families surrounding this area are deeply troubled and anxious about plans made by the Miami Housing Authority which would, in effect, make out of what has been one of the

D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 35.

293. Project In-Step, *Profile of the Elderly*, ii.

294. Jones et al., *A Report on Services*, 11.

295. Frederick Sherman, "Our Senior Citizen: Where Does He Go?," *Miami Herald*, April 16, 1961; Marty Schram, "Protests Fail to Halt High-Rise Building," *Miami News*, Feb. 2, 1965; Frederick Sherman, "Housing to Give Thanks For," *Miami Herald*, Nov. 23, 1967.

finest and solidest residential areas in the city of Miami, a potential slum district,” explained one objector in a letter to Senator Smathers. The author described the proposed high-rise as inappropriate for her single-family neighborhood and argued that area's lack of easily accessible services would undermine the housing authority's efforts to help needy seniors. Although she did not focus her objections on the prospect of having African Americans as neighbors, the correspondent did briefly mention her community's “real concern” that “a housing authority project ... could be integrated if federal funds are used.”²⁹⁶

While the Miami Housing Authority succeeded in facing down community objections to George Smathers Plaza and Robert King High Towers, similar road blocks challenged senior public housing proposals across the United States, often with less favorable outcomes. “I have been very concerned recently about growing evidence that communities are finding it difficult to assimilate the idea of low-cost housing for elderly people,” advised Dr. Powell Lawton, a psychologist with the Philadelphia Geriatric Center. In testimony before the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging Lawton described Philadelphia's frustrated attempts to provide housing for low-income, elderly citizens. During the late 1960s and early 1970s city residents successfully challenged housing authority efforts to construct five new housing projects for the aged. “There was one instance where ... sixty units were proposed at a city council meeting,” Lawton explained. “500 residents of the area in which it was to be located showed up at the meeting. A near riot occurred, and the developer had to be physically rescued by the police.” Lawton enumerated a variety reasons for resistance to such housing, including racism. “My feeling is that the idea of federally sponsored, particularly low-rent housing, makes people fancy a decline of their neighborhood in terms of the

296. Mrs. Richard Stover, Letter to Senator George Smathers, Oct. 9, 1961, “Public Housing Administration (1961)” file, George A. Smathers' Papers.

possibility that this may be a foot in the door for racial integration or for an economic decline of the neighborhood,” he surmised. Above all, though, Lawton blamed ageism as the major stumbling block for senior housing. “Certainly social stereotypes of aging enter into the picture,” he concluded. “Many people break away from the idea that they themselves will age and to have a constant reminder that ‘I, too, am going to age,’ around you – in the form of a housing project for older people – is unpalatable to some individuals.”²⁹⁷

Ageism posed particular problems on Miami Beach, where the senior population ballooned to nearly sixty percent.²⁹⁸ For decades the community had encouraged the migration of retirees and their dependable social security and pension checks. By the late 1960s, however, city boosters and local officials grew increasingly uncomfortable with the aging faces and bodies that surrounded them. These migrants had grown older and frailer. Their bank accounts dwindled as rent and health care costs soared.²⁹⁹ Miami Beach politicians and businessmen worried about the drag so many needy seniors posed to an already struggling economy and obsessed over the impact of the city's old-age image on the tourist trade.³⁰⁰ “Miami Beach has nothing to offer... It is too drab and boring,” complained one local entrepreneur who described the city as a “ghost town with all old people that don't help the economy.”³⁰¹ “We have a problem of age,” agreed a hotel owner. “We just have too

297. United States Senate, *Adequacy of Federal Response to Housing Needs of Older Americans, Part III*, 159-66.

298. *Profile of the Elderly*, 3.

299. Elinor Horwitz, “Jewish Poverty Hurts in South Beach: Experts Disagree on Their Plight but Retirees Charge Neglect,” *National Jewish Monthly* (Jan. 1972), x; *Socio-Economic Diagnostic Study*, 2, 45, 57, 82.

300. Robert Sherrill, “Miami Beach: The All-Too American City,” *New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1968; Bonnie Granat, “Miami Beach Really Doesn't Like Kids,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, June 28, 1970; A.R. Roalman, “How They Get You to Fall in Love with Miami Beach,” *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1972; “Miami Beach Turns Off Younger Set,” *Miami Herald*, June 11, 1976; Don Bedwell, “Beach's Old Friends Outnumber New,” *Miami Herald*, June 11, 1976.

301. A. Mitchell, Letter to the Editor, *Miami Beach Reporter*, May 28, 1970.

many old people coming down year after year.”³⁰² Another hotel owner joked that he hesitated to walk across his own lobby for fear of interacting with unattractive, aged guests. He longed for a younger crowd to “replenish the crop of tourists in the future.”³⁰³

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s boosters worked to infuse the fading resort town with youthful vibrancy and sex appeal. During the 1960s the city hosted the Miss USA and Miss Universe contests and in 1970 it welcomed the Playboy Plaza Hotel to the beach front.³⁰⁴ That same year the city's publicity bureau launched a “Young Summer” program which included free rock concerts, live radio shows broadcast on the beach, and athletic clinics featuring sports stars such as baseball legend Mickey Mantle.³⁰⁵ The bureau also organized a mass marriage publicity stunt in conjunction with the debut of Bob Hope's motion picture, *How to Commit Marriage*. Disc jockeys from across the country advertised the event by encouraging young couples to write in and explain why they wanted to “commit marriage on Miami Beach.” Hope served as best man to the 20 winning brides and grooms who posed in beach-side photographs that were circulated in their hometown papers.³⁰⁶

The city's face lift also included the redevelopment of South Beach, a neighborhood where eighty percent of the roughly 42,000 residents were over the age of sixty-five and

302. Roalman, “How They Get You to Fall in Love.”

303. Jack Roberts, “Old Problem,” *Miami News*, March 24, 1967.

304. In 1970 the pageants were moved to San Juan, Puerto Rico which outbid Miami Beach for the contract. Roalman, “How They Get You to Fall in Love;” Jay Clarke, “Miami Beach Puts Accent on Youth,” *New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1968; Margot Newman and Carol Thomas, “Miami Beach Welcomes Playboy Plaza,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, Aug. 20, 1970.

305. Peggy Fisher, “\$50,000 May Make Beach 'In' Place,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, March 1, 1970; Peggy Fisher, “TDA Allocates \$65,000 for Revised Youth Program,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, April 12, 1970; Peggy Fisher, “Youngsummer '70 – Two Revolutions,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, Aug. 2, 1970; Roalman, “How They Get You to Fall in Love.”

306. Roalman, “How They Get You to Fall in Love.”

many lived in poverty.³⁰⁷ Seniors filled the area's dilapidated boarding houses, hotel rooms, and apartment buildings. Outside, grimy exteriors, untended grounds, and litter-filled sidewalks stood in stark contrast to the bright sunshine and pleasant ocean breezes.³⁰⁸ “The theory up to now was that there were no poor people in Miami Beach,” proclaimed an angry Max Serchuk, the sixty-nine-year-old president of the Dade County Council of Senior Citizens. “But we have all the makings of a senior citizens' slum.”³⁰⁹ Local officials agreed. In the mid-1970s they declared the community “blighted” and created an autonomous agency to redevelop the neighborhood.³¹⁰ Residents like Serchuk called for improved sanitation, the renovation of old buildings, and the construction of low-cost housing designed especially for older Americans. Civic leaders and developers had other plans. Their designs left little room for seniors and included the almost complete demolition of the neighborhood. In its place, they envisioned glittering hotels, plush condominiums, an intricate network of Venice-inspired canals, and a multi-million dollar marina.³¹¹ “I tell you, the people in the hotel industry, the banking industry, the real estate industry, and the developers' industry would like nothing better than to chase all of the senior citizens off the beach,” contended outraged Miami Beach resident and president of the American Federation of Senior Citizens, David

307. Horwitz, “Jewish Poverty Hurts;” Jerry Walley, “Squalor on Miami Beach: New Yorker Offers \$200,000 for Renovation of Low Cost Rentals,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, March 12, 1970; Priscilla Perry, *The Development of Mobility Criteria for the Elderly within the Context of a Neighborhood* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami, 1979), 47, 51.

308. Perry, *The Development of Mobility Criteria for the Elderly*, 75, 77.

309. Horowitz, “Jewish Poverty Hurts.”

310. Perry, *The Development of Mobility Criteria for the Elderly*, 4, 66.

311. Welfare Planning Board of Dade County, *Socio-Economic Diagnostic Study of the South Shore Area of Miami Beach, Florida: An Analysis of the Characteristics and Needs of a Predominantly Older Population* (Miami: Welfare Planning Board of Dade County, 1968), 75, 82; Sam Matter, “South Shore Redevelopment Plan Opened to Public,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, Feb. 27, 1969; Perry, *The Development of Mobility Criteria for the Elderly*, 4.

Taub. "They feel they're a detriment to the tourist economy."³¹²

Nothing spoiled a vacation paradise more than the shadow of a public housing tower, especially one filled with frail seniors. Throughout the 1960s the Miami Beach Council supported big business by declaring such housing unnecessary and inappropriate for the sun-drenched resort town. By 1970, the neighboring city of Miami had constructed six public housing projects for the aged. Yet special interests had successfully blocked the development of even one government housing project on Miami Beach.³¹³ When large crowds of older citizens filled Miami Beach Council meetings to demand public housing, they were met with a cold shoulder.³¹⁴ Council member Mel Richard's aversion to such proposals reflected the city's consistent response to the growing social and economic needs of its elderly poor. "This city was built and designed as a tourist community," announced Richards. "I don't think it's a Miami Beach problem." The councilman suggested that if the city provided housing for every older American who wanted to retire to Miami Beach, indigent elders would inundate the area overnight.³¹⁵ "This isn't indigenous poverty!," agreed a representative from the Miami Beach publicity bureau. "These people put in their productive years in other cities and then they crowd themselves into the most valuable real estate in the country and cry, 'We can't live here on \$150 a month!' We can't refuse people the right to live here, but we can't turn this into a welfare camp."³¹⁶

312. Horowitz, "Jewish Poverty Hurts." Numerous other elderly residents offered similar opinions about South Beach redevelopment. See: Perry, *The Development of Mobility Criteria for the Elderly*, 77-9.

313. *Profile of the Elderly*, 3.

314. Marder, "Realities of a Community Service Program in Public Housing," 97; Jon Nordheimer, "Housing Troubles Tossed to Metro," *Miami Herald*, March 23, 1967; Roberts, "Old Problem."

315. Nordheimer, "Housing Troubles."

316. Elinor Horowitz, "Jewish Poverty Hurts," 33.

Miami Beach seniors fought a long, frustrating battle in their struggle to secure public housing, but by 1970 the tide turned in their favor. Residents' political activism and dogged determination, combined with the inauguration of the Miami Beach Committee for Community Housing and assistance from the newly created Legal Services Senior Citizens Center eventually swayed council opinion.³¹⁷ A large dose of public humiliation also helped. During the early 1970s national news stories and documentaries shown a glaring spotlight on the squalid conditions that existed just beyond the glitz and glamor of Lincoln Road. Angry activists criticized the city for its blatant disregard of its oldest citizens.³¹⁸ In March, 1970 retired New York printer, Allen Hofrichter described the poverty he encountered during a vacation to Miami Beach as “infinitely worse” than conditions that existed in Harlem or the South Bronx. Hofrichter felt so disturbed by what he'd seen that he informed city council members of his \$200,000 donation for the renovation of low-rent housing on the beach. “His offer is a most generous and remarkable one, showing great compassion for his fellow man” responded Herbert Magnes, one of the council's few long-time supporters of public housing. “But in a way it is a shame that people from outside the community have to come into this city and be moved to these fine acts, while those who have been aware of the situation for years, stand by and do nothing.”³¹⁹

In April 1970, seniors filled voting booths and approved a referendum for the

317. Letter from Arthur Courshon to members the Miami Beach Committee for Community Housing, January 20, 1970. Claude Pepper Papers, Series 301, Box 100, Folder 8; “Building-Finance Experts Create Committee for Community Housing,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, Jan. 18, 1970; Jo Anne Werne, “Elderly to Ask Housing: Needs 'Critical' For Beach Poor,” *Miami Herald*, July 15, 1968.

318. David Silverberg, “The 'Old' Poor and the 'New': What's Happening to Them?,” *Present Tense*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring 1977), 59-61, 63; Walley, “Squalor on Miami Beach;” Horowitz, “Jewish Poverty Hurts;” Anne Wolfe, *The Invisible Jewish Poor* (NY: American Jewish Committee, 1971); Cinda Firestone, *South Beach* (NY: Cinema 5, 1976).

319. Walley, “Squalor on Miami Beach.”

construction of Miami Beach's first public housing project for the aged on land donated by the city. The fight was far from over, however. The home owners' association of Palm Island, one of Miami Beach's toniest neighborhoods, responded by filing a suit against the city. The association argued that city had no right to sell recreational land at a quarter of its market value. As the suit wound its way through the judicial system, angry elders armed with picket signs staged protests in Palm Island's once secluded hide-away. Finally, in 1976 - six years after voters first approved the referendum - Rebecca Towers, a 200-unit public housing high rise stood triumphantly on land previously reserved for city dump trucks.³²⁰

Retired Dreams: Long-Term Care in Greater Miami

Seniors who relocated to the safe, clean, and inexpensive living quarters at Rebecca Towers, Robert King High Towers, and George Smathers Plaza, hoped that these accommodations would serve as their “forever” homes. Senior public housing was designed with this aim in mind. The wheel-chair ramps, grab bars, alarm systems, and on-site community centers helped residents whose arthritic hands, deteriorating eye sight, and hearing loss made activities such as bathing, shopping, and cooking a daily challenge. The Miami Housing Authority's Community Services program – first developed in 1962 - offered additional assistance. “Once our elderly move in, this is their home for as long as they are barely able to care for themselves,” explained program director, Bess Marder. “We are committed to helping them remain independent, to help them be participants in their total

320. “Voters Must Approve City Gift for Housing,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, Feb. 12, 1970; Revy Wikler, “Ask Revy,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, March 8, 1970; Revy Wikler, “Ask Revy,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, April 5, 1970; Abe Solosko, “An Appeal to Your Conscience,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, April 19, 1970; Peggy Fisher, “Beach Elderly May Get 200 More Housing Units,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, July 12, 1970; Perry, *The Development of Mobility Criteria*, 84; Horowitz, “Jewish Poverty Hurts.”

community.”³²¹ In 1968 Marder and her small team of six staff members handled the social service needs of the Housing Authority's 4,700 families. Elderly clients received special attention. Service workers coordinated visits with seniors who lived alone in order to solve problems before they developed into emergencies. “We know the community agencies, their eligibility requirements, what they provide and sadly, what they do not,” noted Marder. Her department also completed tenants' hospital application forms “so they don't have to suffer tedious waits in the Eligibility Department” and served as “Medicare and Social Security experts and even funeral arrangement experts.”³²² Marder cautioned, however, that low-rent housing was too often considered a “cure all for all problems” when “we know it is not.”³²³

According to lease requirements, Miami Housing Authority tenants had to be able to care for themselves and their apartments. As the tenant population grew steadily older, this posed an increasing challenge for many residents, among them Edythe, an eighty-two-year old widow and a long-time occupant of Robert King High Towers.³²⁴ Marder's Community Services Department first grew concerned about Edythe after receiving reports about her deteriorating living conditions. Edythe's filthy apartment overflowed with ashtrays, trash, newspapers, and clothing. Things went from bad to worse after Edythe suffered from a number of falls. As her physical and mental health declined, Edythe grew forgetful and recalcitrant. She lost her Social Security checks and did not have enough money for rent or groceries. She picked fights with other tenants. “She couldn't be left alone and had no one,”

321. Marder, “Realities of a Community Service Program in Public Housing,” 98, 100.

322. Ibid., 98-100, 109-110.

323. Ibid., 109.

324. House of Representatives, *The Need for Health and Social Services in Elderly Housing*, 35. 105; Marder, “Realities of a Community Service Program in Public Housing,” 100, 105-9.

explained Marder, whose department attempted to intervene. They tried to convince Edythe to apply for Old Age Assistance, but she refused to do so. They encouraged friends to stop by with food, but Edythe wouldn't eat and she lost weight. Finally, Edythe attacked a neighbor with her cane and ended up in jail. After her release, service workers urged Edythe to voluntarily enter a nursing home. A short time later she attacked a neighbor for a second time. Again, the police responded by locking up the ailing widow. After a court-ordered psychiatric exam, Edythe was declared incompetent. The judge recommended hospitalization and custodial care. During the month-long wait for hospital admission, Edythe remained behind bars.³²⁵

Marder described Edythe's predicament as frustrating and all too common. "If there were resources which provided counseling for the elderly, another resource which provided persons to help them shop, prepare meals, clean, care about the affected person, and act as a buffer between neighbors or society, the Edythes might be able to remain with us longer," she advised³²⁶ Government reports and hearing reached similar conclusions. Throughout the United States, roughly 45,000 seniors in public housing projects faced institutionalization due to a lack of well-funded and properly coordinated health and social welfare programs.³²⁷ "Elderly people may need services that other people do not usually require. They are not as strong as they once were and may need some help with housework. They often do not cook for themselves or eat adequately if left alone ... They need more medical services than younger people," noted a 1976 survey of Greater Miami housing programs. Without such support systems, the survey warned, public housing remained ineffective in keeping the

325. Marder, "Realities of a Community Service Program in Public Housing," 105-9

326. Ibid., 110.

327. House of Representatives, *The Need for Health and Social Services in Elderly Housing*, 3.

infirm indigent out of nursing homes.³²⁸

The oldest and frailest Floridians of all backgrounds faced similar prospects. Well-to-do migrants may have purchased comfortable homes in plush retirement villages, but these communities rarely provided long-term care. “The framework within which developers operate in a free-enterprise system places certain limits on the extent to which they can meet some of the needs of the retired, particularly with respect to health maintenance,” explained University of Florida gerontologists Irving Webber and Carter Osterbind.³²⁹ “Health services and facilities are costly to create and maintain,” agreed University of Miami medical doctor, Samuel Gertman. “They require that hard-to-get and expensive personnel stand by for the times when they will be needed. The private builder, preparing single homes for occupancy on a private basis, does not often concern himself with this problem.”³³⁰ Developers, moreover, often built retirement villages on the less-expensive, metropolitan outskirts. Unlike public housing tenants who lived within a short bus ride of clinics and hospitals, retirement villagers frequently traveled long distances for health care. Finally, consumers themselves gave little thought to the inevitability of decline, dependence, and a future need for medical and social services. Men and women in their fifties and sixties, who had yet to suffer from chronic illness, preferred to focus on recreational and social amenities.³³¹

Tennis tournaments, water aerobics, and dinner dances filled the calendars of many young retirees. As the years passed, however, the disabilities of later life transformed village residents and the neighborhoods they inhabited. “Just as hair grays and skin wrinkles,

328. Jones, et al., “A Report on Services,” 19. See also: House of Representatives, *The Need for Health and Social Services in Elderly Housing*, 35. 105.

329. Webber and Osterbind, “Types of Retirement Villages,” 7.

330. Gertman and Orbach, “Health Services,” 86.

331. Ibid.

retirement communities grow old, too,” remarked journalist Angie Cannon.³³² During her 1984 visit to Broward County's Gold Key West Villas, Cannon discovered empty chairs surrounding the pristine pool and a deserted clubhouse. The Social Club and the Men's Club had disbanded due to dwindling membership. The Women's Club hung on by a thread, meeting occasionally for coffee and danish. “I wish you could have seen this place ten years ago. So active,” recalled seventy-two-year-old Florence Graham. “The police used to patrol the neighborhood when everyone would go to the Jai-Alai, Hidden Harbor or the Jungle Queen. We used to have wonderful parties every weekend. Then they cut that to once a month. Now we don't even have that. We only have bingo ... You could look out your window all day and never see a fly go by.”³³³ “This used to be a real jumpin' place,” agreed eighty-year-old Irving Engleberg. “Now it's death valley.”³³⁴

Gold Key West residents lacked the energy to pursue many of the activities they once enjoyed, but a sense of camaraderie remained. The community's growing list of widows looked after one another. Fitter residents purchased groceries for ailing neighbors. The Telephone Committee continued to circulate news. “We call people and tell them about association meetings, deaths, spraying for chinch bugs, sprinkling the grass – not necessarily in that order,” noted chairman Anne Engelberg. “We get on the phone and tell neighbors to go to the funerals. It's an important part – our being there. The loss is so great and the being alone is terrible.”³³⁵

Supportive peers helped Gold Key West residents maintain some independence while

332. Angie Cannon, “Gold Key West Villas: 'Now it's Death Valley,’” *Miami Herald*, May 7, 1984.

333. Cannon, “Gold Key West Villas.”

334. Cannon, “Gold Key West Villas.”

335. Cannon, “Gold Key West Villas.”

staving off institutionalization. Isolation from the wider community took its toll, however. A lack of readily available support services, including in-home nursing, home-maker assistance, and day-care programs forced many of the frailest seniors in retirement communities across America to enter nursing homes. “It is inevitable that the cumulative pattern of medical, social, and psychological losses results in greater and greater dependency needs on the part of the long-term resident of a retirement village,” noted Samuel Gertman and Harold Orbach. “If he continues to suffer medical losses, he will eventually have to move from a semi-independent state to a nursing home.”³³⁶

As young retirees replaced older villagers, community relationships changed. New residents often avoided aged and ailing neighbors. In a story about South Florida’s Sunrise Retirement village, journalist Laura Misch noted the fear of aging that simmered just below the surface of this seemingly content community. “The young people in this community are in their sixties. They play tennis and swarm the golf greens, staving off what they see happening next door. Their neighbors, who retired here ten years ago, once played tennis, too. Now they congregate in quiet card rooms... Across the street is quieter still. Here, in the oldest section, many have grown too frail to venture out at all.”³³⁷ Even within neighborhoods that catered to retirees, residents felt uncomfortable confronting physical decline and dependency. Many retirement villagers, like citizens in the wider community, chose to segregate the end of life behind a veiled curtain until nursing home placement or death provided final separation.

Retirement hotel guests felt similarly disturbed by the aging bodies that surrounded

336. Samuel Gertman and Harold Orbach, “Health Services in the Retirement Village,” in Ernest Burgess ed., *Retirement Villages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1961), 85-6.

337. Laura Misch, “Retirees on Modest Income May Exhaust State Services,” *Miami Herald*, May 8, 1984.

them. In 1961 and 1967 surveys of Miami Beach retirement hotels, residents commonly bemoaned the presence of “too many sick people.”³³⁸ “Management is now taking in anybody – canes, walkers, and wheel-chair cases – and trying to turn us into one big, happy family,” charged one guest. “True, these cases need a place to go, but there should be places free of such influences for able-bodied retirees.” Another complained, “Too many people who need nursing care are admitted to retirement hotels. This is hard on those who are trying to care for themselves, as they feel an obligation to those who need help, or else they feel inhuman.”³³⁹

Although retirement hotels initially served only relatively fit residents, a growing need for long-term care, combined with proprietor greed led many hotels to offer a “Life Care plan.” In exchange for a large, lump-sum payment or the transfer of property, these contracts promised guests life-long care that included clothing, shelter, food, and medical attention.³⁴⁰ Such services may not have been adequately provided, however, especially for the hotels’ oldest guests. While nursing homes fell under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Health, retirement hotels were licensed by the Hotel and Restaurant Commission, an agency hardly familiar with the special needs of ailing geriatric residents. Managers, moreover, were not required to obtain any special training in elder care. Unfortunately, after pre-purchasing life care, retirees were often reluctant to protest poor treatment, for fear of retribution.³⁴¹

Those unable to purchase life care, meanwhile, struggled along under the looming shadow of illness and financial disaster. “My savings are getting less and less. I will soon

338. Dade County Department of Public Health, *Residents of Retirement Hotels*, 7.

339. Mattice, *Florida Retirement Hotels*, 46, 57-8.

340. Riedel, *Retirement Housing Survey*, 11-13, 52.

341. *Ibid.*, 5.

have to look for cheaper quarters,” worried an ailing eighty-one-year-old retirement hotel resident. “We are not all rich widows... I wish I knew where I could go.”³⁴² With similar plights afflicting seniors across the state, the Florida Commission on Aging blamed hotel promoters for precipitating nothing short of a welfare disaster. “When a retiree is attracted to a hotel through advertisements of gracious living complete for only \$20 a week and can just barely manage this, what happens when he becomes ill? He then becomes a ward of the local welfare agency, the state, and the taxpayer.”³⁴³

When retirement hotel residents joined the ranks of Dade County’s frail and penniless seniors, many ended up in nursing homes, sometimes after enduring a long and uncomfortable stay at Jackson Memorial Hospital.³⁴⁴ Throughout the mid-to-late twentieth-century, Florida - home to the largest concentration of citizens over the age of sixty-five - had the fewest nursing home beds per capita (twenty-two beds per 1,000 residents in 1984, lower than any other state in the country).³⁴⁵ Few Miami nursing homes, moreover, accepted Medicaid patients. So seniors with nowhere else to turn frequently filled hospital hallways, sleeping on cots until a facility became available. According to state statistics, Medicaid patients waited an average of thirty-seven days for skilled nursing home care, and up to six months for placement in an intermediate care facility.³⁴⁶

342. Mattice, 58.

343. Riedel, 7, 9. Mattice, 31.

344. Clarke Ash, “Nursing Home Report Raises Serious Questions for the County,” *Miami News*, July 9, 1973; Ena Naunton, “Health Council Tries to Stem Loss of Nursing Homes,” *Miami Herald*, July 18, 1972; Florida Long-Term Care Ombudsman Committee, *Nursing Home Care in the '80s: Which Way Florida?* (Miami: State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Committee, 1980), 23.

345. Mary Hickey, “As Old Get Older, Troubles Mount,” *Miami Herald*, May 6, 1984.

346. Ash, “Nursing Home Report Raises Serious Questions for the County;” Naunton, “Health Council Tries to Stem Loss of Nursing Homes;” Florida Long-Term Care Ombudsman Committee, *Nursing Home Care in the '80s*, 23.

Lawmakers complained that it cost four times as much to keep Medicaid recipients in the hospital, yet Florida did little to encourage nursing homes to admit state-supported patients. Florida consistently ranked among the bottom three states in nursing home reimbursement.³⁴⁷ In 1977 Florida's nursing home association brought suit against the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, citing inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates, as dictated under federal law. Although the Federal District Court ruled in favor of the nursing homes, Florida's health department appealed and repeatedly resisted raising rates. As a result, many homes closed their doors to state-supported patients.³⁴⁸ "Reimbursement is grossly unfair to the majority of Medicaid providers," Florida's nursing home association explained in a 1980 ombudsman hearing, "It's a losing proposition. No home can expect to break even on a Medicaid patient."³⁴⁹

Some operators turned patients out onto the streets as they converted their struggling nursing homes into lucrative hospitals. In 1972 hundreds of angry protesters failed to halt the closure of Shalom Nursing Home on Miami Beach, whose director planned to turn the facility into an osteopathic hospital. "There are 200 bedridden invalids who are being evicted," cried senior activist David Taub. "There is no need for additional hospital beds; what we need is more nursing homes."³⁵⁰ That need increased as growing numbers of non-profit and family-run establishments went out of business. Only corporate-run chains – with their large inventories and purchasing power - could hope to contain costs and turn a profit

347. Florida Long-Term Care Ombudsman Committee, *Nursing Home Care in the '80s*, 5, 11-12.

348. *Ibid.*, 27-8.

349. *Ibid.*, 27-8.

350. Ed Taylor, "Oldsters Protest in Beach," *Miami News*, Oct. 18, 1972.

under the state's reimbursement scheme.³⁵¹ Unscrupulous homes of all sizes also squeezed profits out of Medicaid by hiring fewer nurses, providing smaller, less costly meals, and unlawfully demanding financial "contributions" from patients' families.³⁵²

In 1976 the State Department of Health and Human Services launched an investigation into the practice of forced donations after receiving scores of complaints against South Florida nursing homes. A state audit revealed, for example, that the Royal Glades Convalescent Home of North Miami Beach obtained over \$62,000 a year in "donations." At the Coral Gables Convalescent Home families supplemented Medicaid payments with forced contributions ranging from \$80 to \$400 a month. In testimony before a U.S. Senate hearing, angry witnesses described the scare-tactics such nursing homes used to elicit donations. At Royal Glades, the administrator threatened to evict Mitchell Porris's ailing mother-in-law unless he contributed \$150 a month towards her care. The Greynolds Park Nursing Home in North Miami Beach refused to admit Irving Glassman's frail mother unless her son paid a \$750 deposit and made regular monthly donations. Nursing home operators denied resorting to such tactics within their own facilities, but they admitted that the problem was widespread. "If you want this kind of thing eliminated, the powers-that-be should provide nursing homes

351. In 1977 there were 38 nursing homes in Dade County. 28 were proprietary, two were owned by the county, four were church-owned, and four were listed as "other" non-profit. See: Long Term Care Task Force, *Nursing Home Services Study Report: Dade County, Florida* (Miami: Health Systems Agency of South Florida, 1977), 5; See also: Nonprofit Nursing Home Committee, *Dade County's Lack of Nonprofit Nursing Home Bed Space for Senior Citizens* (Miami: Welfare Planning Council of Dade County, 1964), 1-2; Ena Naunton, "Health Council Tries to Stem Loss of Nursing Homes," *Miami Herald*, July 18, 1972; John Brecher, "Aged Sob, But Must Leave: Their Haven is Bankrupt," *Miami Herald*, Sept. 21, 1973; June Kronholz, "Patients in Limbo Find Open Arms for Month," *Miami Herald*, Oct. 5, 1973.

352. Carol Gentry, "Rest Home Forced Donations From Us, Three Families Charge," *Miami News*, June 2, 1976; Joel Greenberg, "3 Nursing Homes in Dade Probed," *Miami Herald*, June 3, 1976; Carol Gentry, "Rest Home Got \$62,000 Donations," *Miami News*, June 3, 1976; Carol Gentry, "Senate to Probe Nursing Home 'Donations' Here," *Miami News*, Aug. 9, 1976; Carol Gentry, "Rest Home Forced 'Donation,' Senate Committee Told Here," *Miami News*, Aug. 17, 1976; Carol Gentry, "Chiles Presses Nursing Homes Donation Probe," *Miami News*, Aug. 18, 1976; Joel Greenberg, "Nursing Home Donors Claim Coercion," *Miami Herald*, Aug. 18, 1976; Morton Lucoff, "3 More Miami Nursing Homes Charged," *Miami News*, Oct. 18, 1977; Jim Malone, "Homes Took Bribes, State Tells Court," *Miami Herald*, Oct. 20, 1977.

with sufficient funds,” argued Harry Schnider, the administrator of Miami's North Shore Nursing Home.³⁵³

With a lack of alternatives, the state repeatedly placed frail Medicaid recipients inside these dubious institutions. During the 1970s the local press ran numerous stories detailing the abhorrent conditions that plagued Dade County nursing homes. Investigations revealed unqualified staff and nursing shortages, fire code violations, rat and cockroach infestations, dirty washrooms and kitchens, urine-drenched linens, and the regular theft of patients' belongings. Former employees of Schnider's North Shore Nursing Home told health inspectors about the “deplorable” treatment of patients who were rarely bathed and often denied basic medical attention. The filthy facility was “overrun with bugs of every kind of description.” Nurses found roaches in beds, drawers, sinks, and floating in patients' water glasses. At Miami's Krestview Nursing Home, inspectors noted a mildew-covered ceiling, leaking pipes, and dirty dishes stored for reuse. They also found “holes in the floor where the beds and chairs have pushed through the wood” and confused and disoriented residents tied to chairs. “We found one patient who was tied on a commode chair the entire time of the several days we were in the facility,” the report stated. Stories of physical abuse also filled the papers. The 1974 beating of an eighty-seven-year old woman by a nurse's aid left a bruise the size of a cup across the patient's face and another the size of a saucer on her upper arm. The 1976 assault of nursing home resident Ocie Jones received special attention. Family

353. Mary Hickey, “As Old get Older;” Naunton, “Health Council Tries to Stem Loss of Nursing Homes”; Brecher, “Aged Sob, But Must Leave: Their Haven is Bankrupt”; Kronholz, “Patients in Limbo Find Open Arms for Month”; American Association of Homes for the Aging, “Continuity of Care and Community Planning: The Dade County Story,” *Focus II* (April 1966), 40; Florida Long-Term Care Ombudsman Committee, *Nursing Home Care in the '80s*, 47; Gentry, “Rest Home Forced Donations From Us, Three Families Charge;” Greenberg, “3 Nursing Homes in Dade Probed;” Gentry, “Rest Home Got \$62,000 Donations;” Gentry, “Senate to Probe Nursing Home 'Donations' Here;” Gentry, “Rest Home Forced 'Donation,' Senate Committee Told Here;” Gentry, “Chiles Presses Nursing Homes Donation Probe;” Greenberg, “Nursing Home Donors Claim Coercion;” Lucoff, “3 More Miami Nursing Homes Charged;” Malone, “Homes Took Bribes, State Tells Court.”

members discovered Jones naked, blood oozing from his arms, legs, and head. The seventy-eight-year old died at Jackson Memorial Hospital twenty-four hours later.³⁵⁴

These and other horror stories fueled a growing effort to improve nursing homes while developing alternative forms of long-term care. In 1975 the state created the Florida Nursing Home Ombudsman Committee to “receive, investigate, and resolve complaints” against nursing homes.³⁵⁵ By 1979 the legislature required an annual review and rating of conditions in every Florida nursing home. Homes with poor ratings that did not improve could be shut down. In 1980 the state authorized the appointment of a temporary receiver to take over the management of homes whose conditions threatened resident safety. That same year, Florida expanded nursing home residents’ bill of rights, giving patients more legal protection against abuse and exploitation.³⁵⁶

These changes helped improve conditions inside Florida’s worst nursing homes. But even the best-run institutions, many reformers argued, could not compare to care provided in a patient’s own home. “Most people prefer to live out their remaining years at home,” explained the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Nursing Homes in its 1976 report to the Florida House. Yet, “there is no alternative to nursing home care for those individuals who... require

354. Similar nursing home scandals rocked communities nationwide as many in the burgeoning long-term care business cut corners in order to profit off of the country’s growing numbers of frail seniors. See, for example: “The Spreading Scandal in Nursing Homes,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 31, 1975. Citations for nursing home conditions in Dade County: Sam Jacobs, “Nursing Home Taken Over,” *Miami Herald*, Feb. 18, 1971; Fraser Kent, “State Crackdown Urged on Nursing Homes,” *Miami Herald*, Feb. 2, 1975; Fraser Kent, “Ex-Nursing Home Chief Loses License After Probe,” *Miami Herald*, Feb. 2, 1974; Frank Beacham, “Two Dade Nursing Homes Cited for Deficiencies,” *Miami Herald*, Feb. 4, 1975; Frank Beacham, “Health Probers Find Nursing Home Abuse,” *Miami Herald*, Feb. 20, 1975; “Dade Escapes Deaths in Nursing-Home Fires,” *Miami News*, Sept. 21, 1978; Carol Gentry, “Beating Probed in Death of Nursing Home Patient,” *Miami News*, Feb. 19, 1976.

355. Committee on Health and Rehabilitative Services of the Florida House of Representatives, *Report on the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Nursing Homes* (Jan. 13, 1976), 33.

356. Florida Long-Term Care Ombudsman Committee, *Nursing Home Care*, 3.

twenty-four-hour personal care.” The committee reported that as many as thirty percent of nursing home patients could be adequately served in their own homes if home health care and assistance were provided. It recommended the development of programs such as meal delivery, house keeping, transportation and day-care services for frail and needy seniors.³⁵⁷ In 1980 the Florida Governors Conference on Aging made similar recommendations, stressing the importance of developing and expanding non-institutional services.³⁵⁸

Ballooning costs provided further impetus for reform. Florida’s Medicaid bill grew from \$43 million in 1970 to \$864 million by the early 1980s, with more than three-quarters of the state’s long-term-care dollars spent on nursing home care.³⁵⁹ These costs weighed heavily on policy makers. The state’s oldest citizens made up the fastest growing segment of the population at a time when Florida faced revenue decline and reductions in federally supported social programs. “Nursing home care can cost as much as \$3,000 a month per resident... [And] when private funds run out, Medicaid takes over,” explained John Stokesberry, head of the Division of Aging and Adult Services within the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. “The state cannot afford the price tag.”³⁶⁰

Reformers and policy makers alike pinned their hopes on Community Care for the Elderly (CCE), a state program designed to help frail seniors avoid institutionalization. Developed as a demonstration program in a limited number of locations, including Dade

357. Committee on Health and Rehabilitative Services, *Report on the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Nursing Homes*, 39.

358. FHCA [Florida Health Care Association] *Newsletter*, Feb 1981. See also: William Bell, “Community Care for the Elderly: An Alternative to Institutionalization,” *Gerontologist* (Autumn, 1973), 349-354.

359. “Nursing Home Demand Far Exceeds Supply,” *Miami Herald*, May 8, 1984; Polivka and Oakley, *Long-Term Care*, v.

360. Cannon, “The Old Old,” 107; “Nursing Home Demand Far Exceeds Supply.”

County, CCE received statewide funding in 1980. With its inception, South Florida residents, like Effie Becker, sixty-two, and her eighty-five-year-old mother Clara Lewis, benefited from CCE's house keeping and home-health services, which provided assistance with cooking, laundry, and shopping as well as bathing and personal care. Becker and Lewis, who lived together in a condominium, faced institutionalization after Becker, who was caring for her mother, became wheel chair bound due to illness. CCE preserved their independence just in time. "This program is vital," Becker told the *Herald* in a 1983 story on in-home care. "Without it, the state would be paying to keep two more people in nursing homes."³⁶¹

CCE Day Care Centers, which offered hot meals, recreational activities, and rehabilitative therapy for seniors also received positive press. In 1980 Bernie Simmons, a retired New Jersey maintenance worker felt lonely and depressed after being partially paralyzed by a stroke. "When I first moved down here, I did handyman jobs for all the people where I live," he told a *Herald* reporter. "[Being homebound] nearly killed me." After joining a CCE Center, Simmons received the assistance he required and gained a new lease on life. "I know everyone here," he beamed. "There isn't one of them that I don't have a lot of fun with."³⁶² By 1984 eighteen CCE centers provided a similar life line to hundreds elderly residents in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties.³⁶³

During the 1980s Florida developed additional nursing home diversion programs, chief among them the Medicaid Waiver Program, still in operation today. This federal

361. Cannon, "The Old Old," 106; Mary Hickey, "Care Program Preserves Dignity at a Small Price," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 22, 1983; Becker quoted in Mary Hickey, "Program Preserves Seniors' Independence," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 21, 1983.

362. Cannon, "The Old Old," 106; Simmons quoted in Mary Hickey, "This Place Has Changed My Life," *Miami Herald*, Aug. 2, 1984.

363. Mary Hickey, "New Funds Asked to Help Frail Aged Stay at Home," *Miami Herald*, July 27, 1984.

program allows state use of Medicaid funds for home and community-based services. In Florida, the plan is administered through the Comprehensive Assessment and Review for Long-Term Services program (CARES).³⁶⁴ CARES opened as a Dade County pilot program in 1982. A team of nurses, social workers and physicians screened Medicaid patients to determine if nursing home applicants could be adequately served in their own homes with visiting nurse and housekeeping services. By the mid-1980s Miami CARES screened more than 1,400 nursing home applicants a year and helped a third of them avoid institutionalization. The success of this program convinced the legislature to expand CARES statewide in 1986.³⁶⁵

Despite the promise of CARES and CCE, community and home-based elder care received paltry financial support throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 1985 Governor Bob Graham requested \$30 million to support and expand the CARES program. The state legislature granted only \$22 million, enough to serve 21,660 people a day, but not enough to meet growing need. In Broward County alone, for example, 860 seniors remained on the waiting lists for homemaker or day care center services.³⁶⁶ In 1996 Florida ranked 49th among the states in per capita expenditures on nursing-home alternatives for Medicaid recipients, spending \$60 per person, compared to top ranked Alaska at \$1300, New York at \$1100, and New Jersey at \$216. Nursing homes, meanwhile, received the lion's share of state spending, gobbling up seventy-seven percent of Florida's long-term care expenditures in 1980 and over

364. Lein Han, Charles Barrilleaux, and Jill Quadagno, "Race and Gender Differences in the Distribution of Home and Community Based Services in Florida," in Marie Cowart and Jill Quadagno, eds., *From Nursing Home to Home Care* (Hawthorne Press, 1996), 94-6.

365. Herbert Buchsbaum, "Group's Goal: Steer Healthy Away from Nursing Homes," *Miami Herald*, April 30, 1987.

366. Cannon, "The Old Old," 106.

eighty-eight percent by turn of the twentieth century.³⁶⁷

Ultimately, Florida's commitment to home-based assistance depended on the premise that these services would save the state money. In this regard, programs like CCE and CARES appear to have failed. A 1993 study of Florida's Medicaid waiver system revealed that because CARE served disproportionate numbers of minorities from economically impoverished communities, these services benefited individuals outside of the nursing home network. In other words, CARES programs did not compete with nursing home beds, as CARES clients were unlikely to receive institutionalized care whether or not an alternative existed.³⁶⁸ Other studies yielded similar results. "Community programs as a whole do not seem to reduce the number of nursing home admissions," concluded a 1996 study by the Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging. Citing CCE as one example, the Center argued that Florida's home and community services benefited the reasonably independent, but did not offer enough intensive home care to keep the seriously impaired out of institutions.³⁶⁹

For those who could afford it, Florida's Assisted Living Facilities [ALFs] offered frail seniors another option. These profitable, self-proclaimed alternatives to institutionalization exploded across Dade County during the 1980s, promising ailing elders health care provision in comfortable, even up-scale settings. Developer Horace D'Angelo, for example, designed his assisted living facilities to resemble "manor homes" complete with private restaurants, movie theaters, and silver tea services.³⁷⁰ With residents paying rates upwards of \$3,000 a month, most ALFs did not accept Medicaid. "People attack me because I don't take

367. Polivka and Oakley, *Long-Term Care*, v, 9.

368. Lein Han et al., "Race and Gender Differences," 104-6.

369. Polivka and Oakley, *Long-Term Care*, 30-4,

370. Maryanne George, "Developers Look to Upper-Income Elderly," *Miami Herald*, Sept. 17, 1989.

Medicaid. But if I take Medicaid, I must lower the standards,” explained D’Angelo. “Just because someone is ill and old, they shouldn’t be deprived of nice things.”³⁷¹

The majority of Miami’s working- and middle-class seniors occupied a space between D’Angelo’s for-profit facility and the state-assisted provider. Unable to afford assisted living, but with too many assets to qualify for the state’s community care or nursing home placement, and without family members nearby, these retirees faced the unfortunate dilemma of struggling along unassisted at the end of life or paying for their own long-term care.³⁷² By the 1970s, Florida’s Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services noted that Sunshine State retirement left growing numbers of such seniors in dire straits. “Florida’s seashores and year round warm weather provide hundreds of thousands of elders with a delightful setting for what they hope will be their most dignified years,” reported the department newsletter. “Unfortunately, due to money problems and social attitudes, many suffer disappointment. Consider Ms. Jones, eighty-three, of Miami. She thought she retired with an adequate nest egg, until a heart attack. At first, she could get no public assistance, but intensive care brought bills that swept away her savings. Then she became eligible, because she was broke. With no family to care for her, she moved into a nursing home as a Medicaid patient. Her experience exemplifies the plight of many elder Floridians.”³⁷³

Just a decade before, state boosters and entrepreneurs had eagerly courted retirees such as Ms. Jones, but as these migrants’ health and savings evaporated, so too did the community welcome. While amenity-packed retirement villages, communal hotels, trailer

371. Ibid.

372. Long Term Care Task Force, *Nursing Home Services Study*, 10; Rick Garr, “Nursing Homes Can Drain the People in the Middle,” *Miami News*, April 11, 1974.

373. Bentley Lipscomb, “The Climate of Aging,” *ACCESS* (April/May 1978), 3.

parks, and government housing projects provided retirees with peer-group companionship and a measure of security, many failed to meet needs of the oldest old. When these frail seniors and their families turned to the wider community for long-term-care assistance they often found themselves “looking for resources that,” health officials admitted, “in many cases don't exist.”³⁷⁴ Instead, Florida's oldest citizens endured long waiting lists, uncomfortable hospital stays, and inadequate care inside disreputable nursing homes.

Although Florida officials took a few important steps to improve nursing homes and develop home-based alternatives, they balked at the idea of supplying its rapidly growing senior population with abundant and dependable state-funded elder care. “Florida will never, ever be able to provide for more than the very basic needs,” declared John Stokesberry with the Division of Aging and Adult Services. “We'll do the best we can with what we have, but they can never expect the kind of services they'd get in New York or New Jersey.” If Florida offered more generous long-term care services, “we'd be flirting” with financial “disaster,” he concluded.³⁷⁵ Some politician and business leaders went so far as to suggest that frail migrants return to their hometowns. Florida taxpayers, they argued, should not be held responsible for ailing seniors who left family support systems behind when they moved South. Margaret Jacks, a seventy-six-year-old long-term ombudsman disagreed. “We invited [the elderly] down here. Now it's our responsibility to give them what they need,” she insisted.³⁷⁶

While a fair number of aging retirees returned to their home states, the majority

374. Lipscomb, “The Climate of Aging,” 3.

375. Hickey, “As Old get Older.”

376. Misch, “Retirees on Modest Income May Exhaust State Services.”

remained.³⁷⁷ They felt that they deserved a comfortable and dignified retirement in the Florida. After all, they had established deep roots in their adopted communities and had long contributed to the local economy. When the state failed to fulfill their expectations, growing numbers of retirees demonstrated their discontent at the polls, in public hearings, and through letter-writing campaigns. Spurred on by a rising group-consciousness which germinated in age-segregated retirement villages, golden-age clubs, and senior centers, old-age activism soon flowered in Florida.

377. Glenn Collins, "Increasing Numbers of Aged Return North from Florida," *New York Times*, March 15, 1984.



Illustration 5: Many Florida homes were designed especially for retirees³⁷⁸



Illustration 6: Senior housing often included special features such as wide doors, ramps, and grab bars³⁷⁹

378. *Everything You Need to Know About Retiring in Florida*, 20.

379. *Everything You Need to Know About Retiring in Florida*, 102.



Illustration 7: President Eisenhower examines a model of the Freedom Home, 1961³⁸⁰

380. "Our Big News is Freedom Home!"

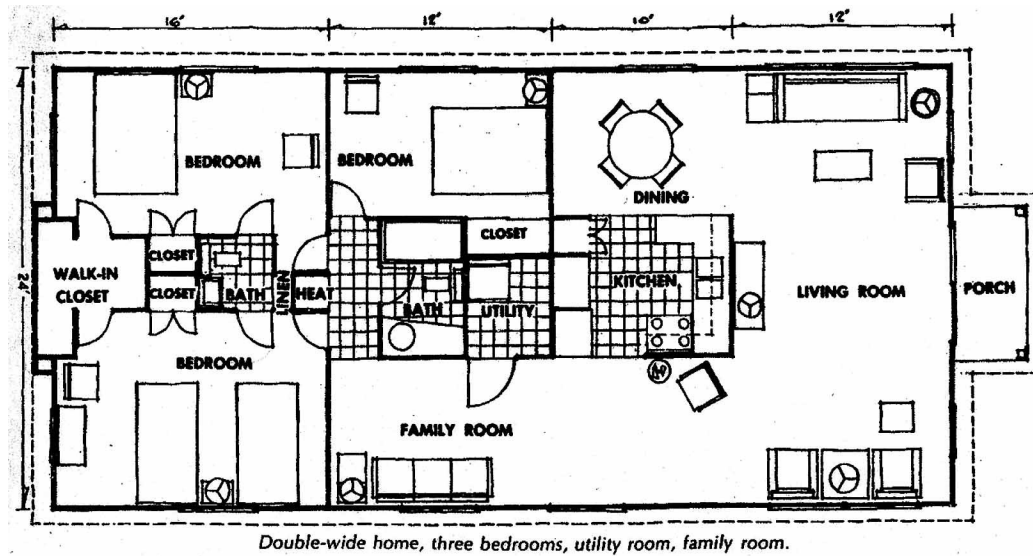
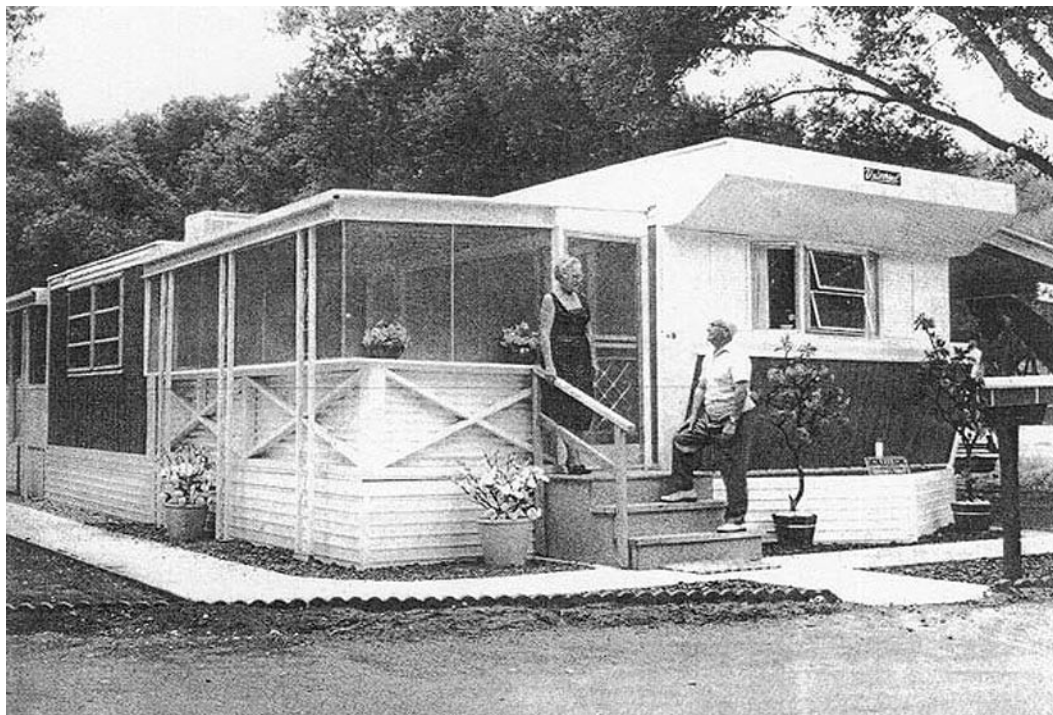


Illustration 8: Floor plan of a typical 1960s double-wide trailer³⁸¹



Although lacking style, private yard of house, homes are easy to maintain.

Illustration 9: *Modern Maturity* magazine advertises the advantages of trailer living³⁸²

381. Hayes, *How to Live Like a Retired Millionaire*, 50.

382. Smith, "How About Mobile Home Living?"



Illustration 10: Robert King High Towers, the first public housing high-rise for older Americans in the Southeast³⁸³



Illustration 11: Residents stroll the landscaped grounds of Robert King High Towers.³⁸⁴

383. Fogarty, "High-Rise Lifts Hopes."

384. "Miami Plans More Public Housing for Its Low-Income Elderly," *Aging*, No. 146 (Dec. 1966), 7.



Miami News Staff Photo by BOB MACK

Illustration 12: Irving Glassman testifies at hearing on nursing homes' forced donations³⁸⁵



Illustration 13: Seniors protest the conversion of a much-needed Miami Beach nursing home into an osteopathic hospital³⁸⁶

385. "Rest Home Forced 'Donation'."

386. Taylor, "Oldsters Protest in Beach."

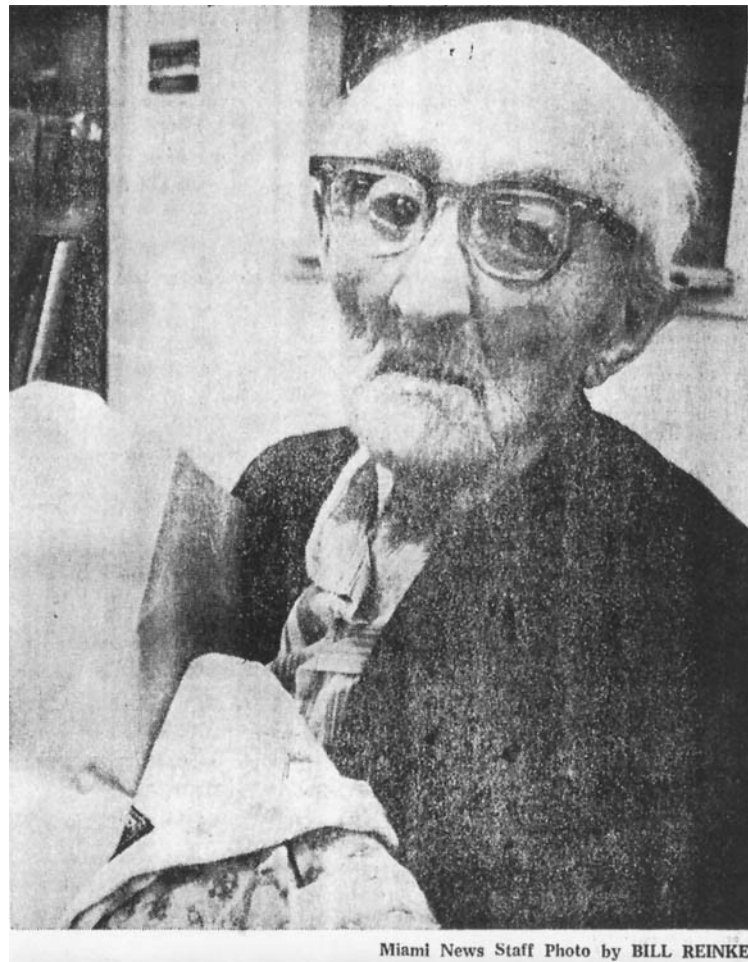


Illustration 14: A ninety-year old Medicaid patient leaves his cot in hospital hallway when a bed is finally secured in a Miami nursing home³⁸⁷

387. "Needy Patients Get a New Home."

CHAPTER THREE

“KINDLY GIVE THIS LETTER YOUR PERSONAL ATTENTION” REEXAMING THE SENIOR POWER MOVEMENT THROUGH RETIREES’ CORRESPONDENCE WITH CONGRESSMAN CLAUDE PEPPER AND SENATOR GEORGE SMATHERS

“These letters indicate that the elderly are thinking of themselves
more as part of a large and growing group.
They are realizing that they must work together.
I think that is progress.”

-Congressman Claude Pepper, 1984³⁸⁸

'T'll Picket the Commission': The Search for Senior Activism

I was a scholar on a mission as I unloaded boxes jam-packed with microfilm copies of the *Miami Herald*, the *Miami News*, and the *Miami Beach Reporter*. Excited by the stories I had already discovered about angry and persistent retirees who battled city council members over Miami Beach's dire need for public housing, I was eager to learn more about senior activism in Florida. An initial immersion in the history of the senior power movement through a review of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* articles which featured mass rallies and demonstrations sponsored by the Gray Panthers and the National Council of Senior Citizens heightened my anticipation.³⁸⁹ I knew exactly the sorts of stories the Miami papers

388. Claude Pepper, *Ask Claude Pepper* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), xi.

389. The Gray Panthers were founded in Philadelphia in 1970 by the charismatic 65-year-old rebel, Margaret Kuhn. The group encouraged activists of all ages to fight ageism and promote peace and social justice. The National Council of Senior Citizens was founded in 1961 with the specific goal of enacting Medicare legislation. With the enactment of Medicare in 1965, NCSC emerged as broad-based senior advocacy group. Sample articles include: Marjorie Hunter, “Small Unit Runs a Drive for Aged: Medical Care Council Maps Plan for Congress Session,” *New York Times*, Nov 19, 1961; “Elderly Picket Reader's Digest,” *New York Times* (Dec

would deliver. I envisioned countless headlines and pictures depicting elderly citizens attending rallies, waving picket signs, and storming the governor's office. Reel after reel left me sorely disappointed. Working my way from 1965 through 1969, I found plenty of articles on seniors – just not the sorts of items that would tell a good story about the birth of activism among Florida retirees. There was the occasional account of a hearing held by the Senate Committee on Aging. One story described the Shuffleboard Club's battle with city commissioners over the disrepair of local courts.³⁹⁰ The majority of the articles, however, focused on far less challenging agendas. One story praised senior volunteers who cheered nursing home patients. Another highlighted the Three Score and Ten Club's trip to the World's Fair. There were stories about retirees enjoying weekend waltzes across the Miami Beach Community Center dance floor and picnics held by the Progressive Senior Citizens League. The *Miami Beach Reporter* featured an “Ask Revy” column with senior requests for employment, in-home assistance, and questions about Medicare Parts A and B.³⁹¹ After a week in the microfilm department, I felt discouraged. Then, at last, I found what I was looking for:

12, 1967); Lawrence Davies, “Elderly, Hit by Inflation, Turn Political,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1970; Barbara Campbell, “Grassroots' Elderly Call for Reforms,” *New York Times*, Feb 26, 1971; “Elderly Stage Protest on Steps of Capitol,” *New York Times*, June 8, 1973; Alice Bonner, “Judge Upholds Cuts in Medicaid Benefits,” *Washington Post*, March 24, 1977; Lawrence Fellows, “Elderly Take Front Row in Lobbying,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1977; Dale Russakoff, “Senior Citizens Lean on Legislators for Pet Project,” *Washington Post*, Feb 13, 1981.

390. Dick Nellius, “Time Shuffles On... Oldsters Want Action,” *Miami News*, Nov 7, 1965; John McDermott, “Elderly Citizens Ask New Tax Protection,” *Miami Herald*, Jan 10, 1969; “Elderly Urged More Aid,” *Miami Beach Sun*, June 1, 1969; Susan Miller, “Senior Citizen 'Unrest' Issued on Beach Council,” *Miami Herald*, July 8, 1969; “Seniors Set Town Meetings,” *Miami News*, Aug 20, 1969.

391. See for example: Elanor Dixon, “A Visitor to Cure Blues,” *Miami Herald*, Nov 18, 1960; “Plush Motel to be Home for Retired,” *Miami News*, Oct 6, 1963; Connie Gee, “She Centers Her Attention on Seniors,” *Miami News*, April 19, 1964; Carol Carey, “It's Never Too Late for a High Old Time,” *Miami News*, May 24, 1965; Dick Knight, “Seniors Told Dance Floor in Park is Out,” *Miami Herald*, June 3, 1965; “He's 88 But Still Helps the Old Folks,” *Miami News*, Oct 4, 1967; Revy Wikler's “Ask Revy” advice column tackled the problems and questions of South Florida retirees. The column was featured in the *Miami Beach Reporter* during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In October 1969 the Metro Commission withdrew financial support from Miami's six senior centers. The Dade County lunch program, which provided nearly 1,000 seniors with an inexpensive daily meal at centers across the city, did not survive the budgetary chopping block. This thriving program had been supported through federal funds as part of a three-year demonstration project under Title IV of the Older Americans Act.³⁹² When the demonstration period expired, so too did federal assistance. The city decided it could not afford the price tag.³⁹³ Senior center members, especially those who depended on the fifty-cent lunches for their one hot meal a day, were shocked and angry. In an interview with reporters, one Malcolm Ross Senior Center member offered the first rallying cry: "I'm blind, but if somebody'll write me a sign and point me in the right direction, I'll picket the Commission!"³⁹⁴

Soon more than 200 seniors gathered at the Malcolm Ross Center to determine a plan of action. The center's president organized his troops: "Somebody's trying to give us trouble. I believe that this crowd can out-fight any trouble." The lunch program required \$58,000 in city funds. "If we apply enough pressure, surely they can find that much." "We're not

392. The Older Americans Act of 1965 created the Administration on Aging (AoA) with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. This federal agency was mandated with the responsibility of developing and managing programs which would help older Americans achieve "freedom, independence and the free exercise of individual initiative." Title IV of the Act authorized the AoA to award funds in support of aging research, demonstration, and training programs. Older Americans Act of 1965, 42 U.S.C., ch. 3001; For more information about the Older American's Act, see: W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray: Old Age, American Values, and Federal Policies Since 1920* (Boston: Little Brown, 1983), 95-97, 104-105; Carroll Estes, *The Aging Enterprise: A Critical Examination of Social Policies and Services for the Aged* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1979), 31-60.

393. Jack Roberts, "Elderly Victims of Lunch Fund Cut," *Miami News*, Oct. 28, 1969; "Keep Humane Program Alive," *Miami News*, Oct. 29, 1969; David Nelson, "Elders Shaken Over Loss of Cheap Meals," *Miami Herald* Oct 30, 1969; Morton Lucoff, "Metro Can't Find Money for Oldsters," *Miami News*, Oct. 31, 1969; "Cain Charges Metro Dodging on Lunches," *Miami News*, Nov. 19, 1969; Bruce Giles, "Homer is Against Subsidizing Meals," *Miami Herald*, Dec. 10, 1969; "Low-Cost Lunches Rejected," *Miami Herald*, Dec. 11, 1969; Press Release, Claude Pepper Library, Tallahassee, Florida, Series 309A, Box 37, Folder 2; December 1969 Letter from the White House, Claude Pepper Library, Series 309A, Box 37, Folder 2.

394. Louise Blanchard, "Youths Not the Only Militants... Fund Cuts Raise Seniors' Wrath," *Miami News*, Oct 30, 1969;

political,” added retiree Julius Justin, “But I think we should get more militant. There are Twenty-million senior citizens in this country.” The group pondered a petition drive directed at Governor Claude Kirk and President Richard Nixon. They called for a bus convoy to Washington to demand a reinstatement of the meal program. One member recommended that the oldest and frailest of the group confront the city commission directly, “so the commissioners can look in the faces of these people and say they're willing to take away the support they need.”³⁹⁵

Despite the seniors' spirited discussions of pickets, protests, and face-to-face show-downs with politicians, the paper trail soon came to a screeching halt. One encouraging news item featured a neighborhood petition demanding the reinstatement of the meal program. “If the politicians can spend money on a jetport for the alligators, they can find money for lunches for elderly people who don't have the Governor's Club to fall back on,” the document growled. This petition, however, was prepared and circulated by a concerned young woman outraged by the commission's mistreatment of her elderly neighbors.³⁹⁶ The seniors, for their part, chose a far less radical plan than the suggestions hatched in their initial meeting. In the end, they agreed on a letter-writing campaign. In the meantime, Miami Senior Centers cut staff members and ran on reduced hours. The hot lunch program was terminated.³⁹⁷

The Gray Panthers' founder Margaret Kuhn described senior centers, retirement communities and clubs as “glorified playpens” and I was starting to agree with her.³⁹⁸ She

395. Blanchard, “Youths Not the Only Militants”; Blanchard, “Seniors Fight for Lunch Money,” *Miami News*, Oct 29, 1969.

396. Louise Blanchard, “‘Old, But Not Dead,’ Say Hot Lunch Petitioners,” *Miami News*, Nov 4, 1969.

397. Nelson, “Elders Shaken.”

398. Dieter Hessel, ed., *Maggie Kuhn on Aging: A Dialog Edited by Dieter Hessel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 16-17, 42-44; Margaret Kuhn, “What Old People Want for Themselves and Others in Society,” in *Advocacy and Age: Issues, Experiences, Strategies*, ed. Paul Kerschner (Los Angeles: Ethel Percy Andrus

criticized most governmental and private social service systems for administering “Novocaine shots” to the elderly. Senior centers, meal programs, and friendly visiting services eased individual pain and suffering, she argued, but recipients remained powerless against the root causes of ageism, loneliness, and poverty.³⁹⁹ The American Association of Retired People and other similar old-age membership clubs were equally culpable. “Most organizations [have] tried to adjust old people to the system and we want none of that,” declared Kuhn. “The system is what needs changing.”⁴⁰⁰ Gray Panthers' worked to shake senior citizens out of their political lethargy. Teaming up with activists of all ages, these “wrinkled radicals” battled on behalf of older Americans as well as the greater public good. “As advocates of change, we seek to change systems rather than ameliorate the hurt and adjust the oppressed to accept their oppressors,” explained the *Gray Panther Manual*. “We seek shared power and responsibility in making the decisions that affect our lives. Powerless ones are the old people (particularly elderly women and other minorities), the poor and the sick people.”⁴⁰¹

The Gray Panthers battled for the democratization of the nation's health and welfare institutions through a variety of means, including consumer advocacy and congressional testimony, multi-generational consciousness-raising sessions, and public rallies and demonstrations.⁴⁰² The improvement of patient care through the establishment of a national health service stood at the top of their agenda, frequently putting the group at odds with the

Gerontology Center, 1976), 91.

399. Hessel, *Maggie Kuhn*, 17, 24-25 (quote on 25); Maggie Kuhn, “Grass-Roots Gray Power,” *Prime Time* (June 1974), 4-6.

400. Ibid, 106; Quote from “New Outlook for the Aged,” *Time* (June 2, 1975).

401. Harriet Perretz, *The Gray Panther Manual* (Philadelphia: Gray Panthers, 1978), 93.

402. Ibid., 90-93.

American Medical Association [AMA].⁴⁰³ In one of the Gray Panthers' most memorable campaigns, activists staged “guerrilla theater” outside the association's 1974 convention. *The Gray Panther Manual* proudly recounted the event: A “picket of 200 old and young people ... disabled in wheel chairs ... blind people with canes, walked around the hall. Hundreds of leaflets were handed out ... by marchers carrying signs asking the AMA to 'have a heart' ... [A van] decorated as an ambulance drove to the entrance of the hall ... 'Medics' rushed out to make a house call on the sick AMA ... They assisted another GP, impersonating the 'sick AMA' from the hotel to the ambulance. On the sidewalk they tried to resuscitate him and used stethoscopes to find his heart. As they probed his chest, they pulled out wads of dollar bills. Finally they found his heart and were able to save him.”⁴⁰⁴ Comparing this and other stories of Gray Panther glory with the paltry evidence I'd acquired from the Miami papers left me feeling terribly disheartened. The Miami Beach battle over public housing, I concluded, offered the one exception that proved the rule. Faced with similar challenges, such as the removal of a much need hot lunch program, the average elder remained unable or unwilling to react in any meaningful way. Retirement too often constituted complacency. My initial foray into the Florida senior power movement flatlined.

Pick up Your Pens!:
Florida Retirees and Armchair Activism

The Miami papers delivered a damp squib where I had expected dynamic tales of senior activism. Twentieth-century retirees, after all, comprised an increasingly important and problematic segment of the South Florida population. Between 1950 and the mid-1970s

403. Ibid., 23-24.

404. Ibid., 11-12.

hundreds of thousands of older Americans moved South to bask in the Florida sunshine.⁴⁰⁵

The majority of these migrants were younger, healthier, wealthier, and better educated than the older adults they left behind.⁴⁰⁶ As a result, most young Florida retirees greeted later life with buoyant optimism. Inevitably, however, retirees grew older and frailer. Some developed chronic health problems. By the late 1960s rapidly rising food, transportation, and medical expenses plundered savings and deflated pension and Social Security checks.⁴⁰⁷ As retirees' romance with the Sunshine State waned, many once self-sufficient migrants reluctantly relied on Miami's wide array of public and privately-operated adult services. In addition to Dade County senior centers, retirees turned to public housing, public welfare, food stamp, and employment retraining programs as well as homemaker services, adult legal services, nursing

405. In search of the many advantages touted by the guidebooks, migrants retiring to Florida grew to encompass more than thirty-eight percent of the state's sixty-five-plus population as early as 1953. In 1960 Floridians aged sixty-five and over composed 11.2 percent of the state's population, the fourth highest percentage in the country. By 1970, the continued in-migration of older persons helped boost that percentage to 14.5 percent, the highest in the country -- and considerably higher than the national average of 9.9 percent. See: "Great Variations Found in State Aging Population Patterns," *Aging* (Oct 1971), No. 204, 10-11.

406. As Jennifer Ann Woodward explains, migrating seniors differed in numerous ways from the average elderly population, because migration was a selective process, especially among older Americans. Historically, the great majority of seniors did not migrate, and the elderly interstate migrants tended to be "positively selected." See: Jennifer Ann Woodward, "Aging-in-Place and Migration as Sources of Projected Population Growth: An Analysis for Arizona, California, Florida, and New York," (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Geography, University of Colorado, 1987), 86. It is also important to note that while in-migrating retirees to Florida and other Southern states were wealthier, healthier, and better educated than the older adults they left behind, seniors native to the South lagged behind rest of the country in all of these categories. See: Stuart Rosenfeld and Mary Eldridge, "Growing Old Southern," *Southern Exposure* (March-June, 1985), Vol. XIII, 130-132 For more information on the demographics of migrating seniors see: Charles Longino, Jeanne Biggar, Cynthia Flynn, Robert Wiseman, *The Retirement Migration Project: A Final Report for the National Institute on Aging* (Center for Social Research in Aging, University of Miami: Coral Gables, FL, 1984).

407. Madelyn Kafoglis, "Economic Aspects of the Migration of Older People," in Carer Osterbind, ed, *Migration, Mobility, and Aging*, Vol 23 (Gainesville: University Presses of FL, 1974), 96; Thomas Collins, "Low Money is Shaping Up for Retirement in the '70s," *Miami Beach Reporter*, March 1, 1970. Inflation in the late 1960s and 1970s created economic hardship on seniors across the United States. See: United States Senate Special committee on Aging, *Economics of Aging: Toward a Full Share in Abundance, Hearings Before the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate, 91st Congress, 1st Session* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969); "Life for the Elderly in 1975 - Many Are Hungry and Afraid," *U.S. News and World Report*, Feb 10, 1975; Bernard Nash, "Help! The Time for Special Attention on Inflation in Behalf of Older Americans is Now," *Modern Maturity* (Oct/Nov 1974), 4-5;

homes, and mental health centers.⁴⁰⁸ When these under-funded and over-extended programs let them down, I expected South Florida retirees to flood in the streets in protest. Instead they flooded politicians' headquarters with letters.

When Congressman Claude Pepper received letters from hungry and angry senior center members, his response was swift and far reaching. Pepper quickly penned his own missive, which arrived on President Richard Nixon's desk in mid-November. It is “tragic that our older citizens have suddenly been deprived of a program so necessary to their physical and mental well-being,” he wrote. “It is a tribute to the social conscious of our people that this experiment was inaugurated and carried out so successfully. There can be no moral reason for its termination ... I urge you, Mr. President, to recommend whatever necessary to ... maintain the low cost meal program.”⁴⁰⁹ In December the White House notified Pepper that there was “no probability” of federal funding for Miami's meal program. The congressman then called for immediate action to allow older Americans to exchange food stamps for prepared meals.⁴¹⁰ Early in the new year he also introduced legislation calling for the creation of a federally-funded Elderly Nutrition Program. In 1972 Congress approved the plan, establishing congregate low-cost meal programs in Miami and communities across the country.⁴¹¹

Throughout his long career Pepper worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life

408. United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights: Age Discrimination in Federally-Assisted Programs, Hearings Held in Miami, Florida, August 22-23, Vol. I: Testimony* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977).

409. Press Release, Nov 23, 1969, Series 309A, Box 37, Folder 2, Claude Pepper Library.

410. Press Release, Nov 5, 1969, Series 309A, Box 37, Folder 2, Claude Pepper Library.

411. Marjorie Hunter, “House Approves Meals for Aged,” *New York Times*, Feb 8, 1972; Press Release, May 13, 1970 (Claude Pepper Library, Tallahassee, Florida, Series 309A, Box 37, Folder 4); H.R. 17612, A Bill to amend the Older Americans Act of 1965, May 13, 1970 (Claude Pepper Library, Tallahassee, Florida, Series 309A, Box 37, Folder 4)

for older Americans. He served in the Senate from 1936 to 1951 and as a Miami representative in Congress for twenty-six years from 1963 until his death at the age of eighty-nine in 1989. In Congress, Pepper chaired the Select Committee on Aging. This advisory and investigative body lacked the authority to produce legislation, but as the *Washington Post* aptly noted, chairman Pepper converted a “generally powerless tool ... into a buzz saw.”⁴¹² Pepper's committee toured the country conducting well-publicized, heated public-hearings on such topics as age discrimination in employment, the inadequacy of senior housing, and the impact of inflation on retirees' economic well-being. These hearings, combined with Pepper's fiery congressional and public speeches helped to place the national spotlight on the special needs of the aged.⁴¹³ During his congressional tenure Pepper secured numerous programs and protections for older citizens. He was influential in the creation of Medicare, Medicaid, and the Older Americans Act. He strengthened social security, helped to establish the National Institute on Aging, and defeated mandatory retirement laws. A 1983 *Time* magazine cover story on Pepper described the eighty-three-year-old statesman as America's “champion of the elderly.” The article noted that “some thirty-six million Social Security recipients and millions more who are nearing retirement, count on Claude Pepper to protect their rights and wellbeing. And Pepper has doggedly done so.”⁴¹⁴

As I perused archival documents at the Claude Pepper Library, however, it became abundantly clear that the congressman was no simple knight in shining armor, charging in to

412. Ward Sinclair, “Representative Pepper: Fiery Advocate for Elderly,” *Washington Post*, Nov 9, 1979.

413. For an analysis of Claude Pepper's remarkable rhetorical ability and its impact on the senior power movement, see: Robert Aronoff, “The Rhetorical Vision of Claude Pepper and the Nation: Reconstituting the View of the Elderly in America,” (unpublished Master's Thesis, Communication Studies Department, Florida State University, 2002).

414. *Time* was among many of the nation's magazines and newspapers that featured stories on Claude Pepper's dedicated legislative battles on behalf of older Americans. See for example: Ed Magnuson, “Champion of the Elderly,” *Time* (April 25, 1983); “Champ of the Elderly,” and “No Rest at 89,” *Time* (Oct 10, 1977).

improve the plight of helpless seniors. Elderly constituents were their own best advocates. They engaged in a partnership with Pepper which kept the congressman on his toes. The archives overflowed with thousands of letters from older Floridians. These prolific correspondents detailed senior citizens' problems and frustrations, commented on pending legislation, and offered instructions for improving retirement conditions. Senator George Smathers' papers at the University of Florida provided a similar bounty. File after file bulged with correspondence from elderly constituents. Smathers served as chairman of the Special Committee on Aging during the mid-to-late 1960s and dedicated much of his fourteen years in the Senate (1951-1967) to Social Security, the Older Americans Act, health care and housing legislation, and many other issues of special importance to seniors.⁴¹⁵ Florida retirees demanded as much from their senator as they did of Congressman Pepper. Their correspondence detailed the economic and emotional trials of retirement, provided policy advice, and sometimes offered pointed criticism.

I spent a month in the Claude Pepper and George Smathers archives mesmerized by the abundance and quality of retirees' letters. It didn't take long for me to reevaluate my original perspective on the senior power movement. As I reviewed the letters I had initially dismissed, it was readily apparent that the Malcolm Ross letter writing campaign was not a cowardly compromise, but a strategic decision on the part of the senior center members - one that they employed regularly as a group and on an individual basis. In my desire to uncover dramatic, direct-action protest among Miami retirees, I had underestimated the power of the written word, especially when it was applied en-masse and etched on page after page in painful, arthritic script.

Scholarly and popular reviews of the senior power movement tend to focus only on

415. "With Winning Ways, Florida's Junior Senator Steps into Action," *Florida Suntime*, July 4, 1953.

the lobbying efforts of senior-advocacy organizations at their top leadership levels⁴¹⁶ or on the headline-stealing demonstrations of the relatively small numbers of radical activists.⁴¹⁷ Observers have paid less attention to ordinary older Americans. The work that does exist frequently focuses on statistical analyses of senior voting patterns, which provide little insight into the specific motivations and opinions of individual elderly voters. Through a close analysis of hundreds of letters collected from the Claude Pepper and George Smathers archives, this chapter explores the senior power movement from the perspective of typical Florida retirees. It is important to note that these letter writers do not represent all mid-century seniors. Senior migrants to the Sunshine State embarked on retirement with more wealth and in better health than the average elder – though these advantages often waned as retirees grew older. Also, the vast majority of migrants were white.⁴¹⁸ Although the senior correspondents rarely identified their racial and ethnic backgrounds, I found only a few letters from Hispanic elders and no letter writers described themselves as African American. I also posit that there is a difference between mid-century retirees and older Americans more

416. See for example: Clark Tibbitts, "Organizations for the Elderly: Political Implications," in Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbitts, eds, *Politics of Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1962), 135-145; Robert Binstock, "The Politics of Aging Interest Groups: Interest Group Liberalism and the Politics of Aging," *The Gerontologist* (Autumn 1972), 265-280; Robert Harootyan, "Interest Groups and Aging Policy: Interest Groups and the Development of Federal Legislation Affecting Older Americans," in Robert Hudson, ed, *The Aging in Politics: Process and Policy* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1981), 74-85; Henry Pratt, *The Gray Lobby* (University of Chicago, 1976) and *Gray Agendas: Interest Groups and Public Pensions in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1993); Christine Day, *What Older Americans Think: Interest Groups and Aging Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Lawrence Alfred Powell, Kenneth Branco, and John Williamson, *The Senior Rights Movement: Framing the Policy Debate in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

417. See for example: Paul Kleyman, *Senior Power: Growing Old Rebelliously* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1974); Maggie Kuhn, *No Stone Unturned: The Life and Times of Maggie Kuhn* (New York: Ballantine, 1991); Patricia Huckle, *Tish Sommers, Activist, and the Founding of the Older Women's League* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

418. For example, 1970 census data indicated that out of 51,000 Miami Beach citizens over the age of 60, only 87 were African American. See: Metropolitan Dade County Improvement Program, *Profile of Metropolitan Dade County: Conditions and Needs* (Miami, FL: Metropolitan Dade County Community Improvement Program, 1974), 27.

generally. While growing numbers of American elders left the workforce, retirement was associated with a life of leisure and at least basic economic security. Many elderly, mid-century African Americans were unlikely to think of themselves as 'retirees' or participate in the burgeoning retiree culture in the same way that white Florida migrants did. For example, although African American men often 'retired' earlier than their white counterparts, illness or injury often precipitated this withdrawal. Moreover, because so many African Americans worked in jobs that provided few, if any, pension benefits, many older blacks struggled to reenter the labor force or took odd jobs in an effort to make ends meet. These men and women may have thought of themselves as unemployed, disabled, or aged, but they most likely did not describe themselves as 'retirees.'⁴¹⁹

The personal stories and political demands detailed in these letters provide a unique window into the socio-political outlook of mid-century white, middle- and working-class retirees. What happened when unexpected economic hardship, age discrimination, and an increasing need for over-stretched governmental services drained their once adequate savings? Why did so many of these retirees, such as the members of the Malcolm Ross Senior Center, engage in letter writing campaigns while eschewing more direct forms of protest? What changes did these correspondents hope to achieve? What were the costs and the benefits of their political choices? While the majority of Florida retirees never donned senior-power buttons or staged protests, their active engagement in the political process helped to amend the emerging retirement system and greatly improved the quality of later life at the turn of the twenty-first century.

419. For a discussion of the prevalence of "unretired-retired" elderly African Americans, see: Lola Irelan and Kathleen Bond, "Retirees of the 1970s," in Carter Osterbind, ed., *Migration, Mobility, and Aging* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 50-51 and Rose Gibson, "The Work, Retirement, and Disability of Older Black Americans," in James S. Jackson, ed., *The Black American Elderly: Research on Physical and Psychological Health* (NY: Springer Publishing Company, 1988), 304-324.

**Dear Senator:
Florida Retirees' Rising Discontent**

March 25, 1964

Dear Sir [Senator Smathers]:

I thought you would be interested to know that my husband and I have lived on his Social Security ... for the past ten years. If we had not invested the tiny amount of money, all we possessed at that time, in buying concrete blocks and second hand plumbing, we would be in terrible straits. We starve but we are dry.

The price of food has gone up to such an extent that [those who depend on Social Security] ... to keep body and soul together have become dejected and forgotten ... These people are fine caliber. Their only fault being that they are old and still capable of breathing. I have no idea how some of them are able to pay their rent. For we, owning a home, have a tough time paying for our insurance, garbage [collection], and the paper (which, of all things, my husband has left for entertainment). Yes, we have a television which keeps the repairman in pocket. We must run the car and keep it moving like a shark or the battery runs down ... Our roof has needed repairs for a year. [We need] pills for my husband, who's urologist has kept the grave in return for all the money we had in our emergency fund.

Sometimes we are able to rent part of our house and we're fortunate in this respect. When it was occupied for two years the money paid for my husband's operation. Now with vacancies around us it has been empty for some time. So, with no bank account and no hospitalization [insurance], what do you suggest? We were told that although my husband is seventy-five, we cannot receive any help as long as we have an opportunity to receive an income from the house, which is nothing but a concrete soap box.

There will be many people wondering about this obvious indifference to the elderly. They have been very patient, poor creatures, thinking half a loaf is better than none ... There is hope perhaps in moving to another location, Mexico ... or some little island that would build a condominium for the elderly. Florida has so much land. Could it be that the people who possess so much are blind to the fact that the poor make up the backbone of the country? When we were young we spent and bought and kept things in circulation. Now no one will give us a job because we are too old – and so we sit and rot.

-Mrs William Bamford, Lake Park, Florida⁴²⁰

Mrs. William Bamford wrote to Senator George Smathers on a number of occasions.

Her poetic style is extraordinary, but the substance of her letter is representative of the typical retiree epistle addressed to Senator Smathers and Congressman Pepper during the mid-twentieth century. A number of factors spurred retirees to write to their representatives. These included a simmering indignation over personal circumstances as Florida's once comfortable

420. Mrs. William Bamford, March 25, 1964. Letter located in folder marked, "Social Security, 1964," George A. Smathers' Papers, P.K. Young Library of Florida History, University of Florida. Note: The George Smathers' papers were being reorganized when I collected this research in the summer of 2006. Box numbers were unavailable. Folder titles and their content should not change. The author has retained copies of all of the letters quoted in this essay.

elderly migrants endured a rapid decline in economic and social status; older Americans' growing dependence on Social Security, Medicare, and other government programs; and an emerging minority-group consciousness among retirees – an identity fostered by the tremendously popular age-segregated communities which sprang up across the state throughout the 1950s and 1960s and by the similarly rapid growth of senior groups and senior centers. Retirees who endured similar hardships as their neighbors and friends began channeling individual frustrations into organized action.

Mrs. Bamford's letter details a retiree's unanticipated and unjustified fall from grace. After years of hard work and careful investments, the Bamfords survived on an uncomfortably tight budget. Medical bills presented a constant worry. Mrs. Bamford notes that she is not alone. She knows many people “of fine caliber” who are struggling “to keep body and soul together.” Indeed, the injustice of the retiree's plight was a popular theme among correspondents. Once “the backbone of the country,” these retirees had raised families, fought in the First and Second World Wars, and kept the economy moving. Now many were reduced to pinching pennies. Some slid below the poverty line and turned to welfare departments in desperation.⁴²¹ Most believed that the government and the nation owed them support and gratitude. Instead, they felt forgotten. “Will you kindly give this letter your personal attention,” requested a Jacksonville widow. “I feel we elderly people are entitled to some consideration ... as we are the ones who have struggled to make our country what it is today and our work was not done with a press of the button or a ride on rubber tires.”⁴²² “I've never asked any of you in Washington or anywhere for any help,” announced a

421. By 1974 Floridians sixty-five years of age and older composed fifteen percent of the state's population. Of this group, nearly one in four had incomes below the poverty level. See: Kafoglis, 94.

422. Letter from Alma Kountz, Nov 15, 1961, “Federal Housing Administration, 1961,” George A. Smathers' Papers.

proud Tallahassee widow. “I did go to public welfare about three years ago. It made me feel so bad to think that we mothers and grandmothers who raised the boys that keep our country free, in our old days have to almost beg to keep from being hungry.”⁴²³ “Maybe I did more for my country than some Senators,” concluded a seventy-nine-year-old New Port Richey man. “I was in the navy and army in World War One. I made a trip around the world with Teddy Roosevelt and was always happy to serve my country.” By 1964 this veteran and his wife were barely scraping by on \$41 a month. “My savings has gone down to almost nothing due to high prices ... How about President Johnson and his poverty program?,” the man concluded cynically. “I see by the paper that Social Security is going to get a five percent raise – BIG DEAL! This means I would get \$2 more per month, which won't keep us in bread.”⁴²⁴

Correspondents filled page after page with intimate stories that resembled diary entries. A number of retirees, for example, described the heavy emotional and financial toll of caring for an ailing spouse. These letters divulged personal details and feelings that writers may not have felt comfortable sharing with close friends and loved ones. “Recently Mrs. Tallman had to be hospitalized,” confided Mr. Tallman in a letter to Congressman Pepper, “[The hospital] and the doctor ... have taken our entire life savings leaving us with considerable debt. After this, she shows no improvement and I fear she will not be her normal self again. She had two strokes and is unable to help herself. Should her condition become worse we shall have to forgo medical treatment and revert entirely to prayer.”⁴²⁵ “What would you do if someone you loved was slowly passing away in front of you and you could

423. Letter from Mamie Parker, May 18, 1964, “Social Security, 1964,” George A. Smathers' Papers.

424. Letter from Ed Pollens, July 6, 1964, “Social Security, 1964,” George A. Smathers' Papers.

425. Letter from K.V. Tallman, Dec 6, 1967, Series 309A, Box 35, Folder 2, Claude Pepper Library.

do nothing to help?,” a Daytona Beach retiree inquired of Senator Smathers. “That’s what I’m up against. My wife is sixty-five years old and I am sixty-four ... We both get Social Security. My wife [receives] \$34.50 and I [get] \$57.20 ... I had a Dr. Bellot taking care of her ... [He said] she would be an invalid the rest of her life and we have the x-rays to prove it. We can’t get along on what we get and ... [we can no longer afford our] family doctor ... We haven’t even got insurance. In case one of use died, we couldn’t even bury the other. So please, as our Senator, see what you can do to help us.”⁴²⁶

It may seem surprising that retirees shared such painful, personal stories with public officials. Their choice to do so makes perfect sense, however, when you consider the fact that the American government and private institutions increasingly replaced the family as a primary provider of financial and social support to older people throughout the twentieth century. Until the early 1900s, most infirm and needy aged relied exclusively on family members for comfort and assistance.⁴²⁷ By the mid-1960s older Americans turned to the expanding welfare state – including Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, senior centers, and numerous other governmental programs - to meet many of their basic needs.⁴²⁸ In 1978 sociologist Russel Ward noted that adult children continued to provide elderly parents with ongoing emotional support as well as emergency assistance in times financial crisis and bereavement. He concluded, however, that the extended family was “no longer appropriate to meeting the long-term, chronic needs of older people – money, nursing care, housing, and transportation.”⁴²⁹ A national study of the retirement process conducted by the Social Security

426. Letter from Charles Feshkens, May 23, 1963, “State Welfare Board, 1963,” George A. Smathers’ Papers.

427. W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 75-86.

428. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 149-153.

429. Russell Ward, “Limitations of the Family as a Supportive Institution in the Lives of the Aged,” *Family*

Administration in 1969 described these changing intergenerational relationships as “intimacy at a distance.”⁴³⁰ Extended families continued to depend upon and look out for one another. They kept in touch through frequent phone calls and visits. Adult children often provided personal assistance to frail parents by helping, for example, with grocery shopping, meal preparation, and other daily chores. Increasingly, however, older parents and adult children ran their own households and lived separate lives – a new arrangement that many families preferred. Grown children enjoyed some relief from the financial and emotional burdens of elder care. Older adults cherished their independence. Both generations came to rely on the government to provide the elderly with the means to achieve it.⁴³¹

The term “intimacy at a distance” is especially appropriate for describing the family relationships of Florida retirees who left kin support systems behind as they migrated south.⁴³² Some correspondents turned to Senator Smathers and Congressman Pepper because family assistance was simply unavailable. In 1961 Miami resident Beulah Carpenter, an eighty-one-year-old widow with deteriorating eye sight and in general poor health, wrote to Smathers asking for a much-needed increase in her Social Security and veteran benefits. In the past, Carpenter had turned to her brothers for financial assistance, but both men were recently deceased. “I have no one to help me now,” Carpenter stated. “Expenses on

Coordinator, (Oct 1978), 370.

430. Lola Irelan and Kathleen Bond, “Retirees of the 1970s,” in Carter Osterbind, ed, *Migration, Mobility, and Aging* (Gainesville: FL, University Presses of Florida, 1974), 57.

431. Ward, “Limitations of the Family,” 365-373; Irelan and Bond, “Retirees,” 43, 54, 55-57; Robert Havinghurst and Ruth Albrecht, *Older People* (NY: Longmans, Green and Co, 1953), 144-152; Brian Gratton, “The Creation of Retirement: Families, Individuals, and the Social Security Movement,” in K. Warner and A. Andrew Achenbaum, eds., *Societal Impact on Aging: Historical Perspectives* (NY: Springer Publishing Co., 1993), 59-62; Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 149-153; Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 70-72, 158-160; Achenbaum, *Social Security: Visions and Revisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 40.

432. Many of the nation's rural elderly faced a similar loss of dependable kinship support systems due to the out-migration of adult children and other younger relations. See: Ward, “Limitations of the Family,” 366.

everything – food and medicine, both – are simply out of reason ... I have to have someone in the house for protection as I have black out spells and go down with no warning ... I am in need of a raise in the checks ... I do not have any relations here and not many back up north that could care for me. Please see what you could do about it for me.”⁴³³

Beulah Carpenter took action when relatives could no longer help her make ends meet. But had she been unable or unwilling to seek outside assistance, an elderly friend or neighbor may well have spoken up for her. Miami resident, Jacob Rosenstein, an eighty-seven-year-old retired New York detective was fortunate in this regard. When the octogenarian received paltry assistance from the local welfare board, his friend Chester Strong turned to Senator Smathers. “This letter concerns the welfare of a friend, one Mr. Jacob Rosenstein [who] was unfortunate for a number of years due to the lingering illness and passing of his wife which almost depleted his life savings,” explained Strong. “He finally applied for and received state aid to the extent of \$16. He is a good man, mentally alert with excellent behavior. The minimum amount of the award prompts me to consult you.”⁴³⁴

Mid-twentieth-century gerontologists observed the growing importance of friendships among older Americans, a majority of whom no longer lived within extended families.⁴³⁵ Seniors' letters to Senator Smathers and Congressman Pepper reflected the fact that although

433. Letter from Beulah Carpenter, June 25 1961, “Social Security, 1964,” George A. Smathers' Papers.

434. Letter from Chester Strong, Feb 23, 1963. In a follow-up letter to Senator Smathers dated Oct 1, 1963, Strong thanks the senator for intervening on his friend's behalf and reports that Rosenstein now receives \$101 a month in Old Age Assistance. See: “State Welfare Board, 1963,” George A. Smathers' Papers.

435. See for example: Ward, “Limitations of the Family,” 368-369; Marjorie Lowenthal and Clayton Haven, “Interaction and Adaptation: Intimacy as a Critical Variable,” *American Sociological Review* (Feb 1968), 20-31; Zena Smith Blau, “Structural Constraints on Friendships in Old Age,” *American Sociological Review* (June 1961), 429-439; Marc Petrowsky, “Marital Status, Sex, and the Social Networks of the Elderly,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Nov 1976), 749-756; Greg Arling, “The Elderly Widow and Her Family, Neighbors, and Friends,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Nov 1976) 757-768; Vivian Wood and Joan Robertson, “Friendship and Kinship Interaction: Differential Effect on the Morale of the Elderly,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (May 1978) 367-375.

retired migrants visited with sons and daughters, grandchildren and siblings during holidays and vacations, they interacted with elderly friends and neighbors on a daily basis. Retirees, therefore, were often better able than far-flung family members to assess one another's special needs and to intervene when help was needed. While the statesmen received the occasional inquiry from an adult son or daughter expressing concern about an elderly parent's predicament, letters such as Chester Strong's were far more common. For many retirees, support from aged peers helped to replace the loosening bonds of the extended family. This may have been especially true in Florida, where retired migrants congregated in the card rooms, shuffleboard courts, and dining halls of age-segregated retirement villages, hotels, and trailer parks.

“Me” and “I” Becomes “Us” and “We”: Retirees' Emerging Group Identity

Ensnared within the tidy grounds of communities composed entirely of residents of similar ages and backgrounds, retirees felt comfortable keeping an eye out for one another. Special friendships and social customs developed. Just as college campuses provided a largely age-segregated setting where youth culture flourished, retirement villages nurtured the growth of peer-group identity among men and women at the other end of the life course.⁴³⁶ During the early 1960s sociologists Talcott Parsons and Arnold Rose identified an emerging “subculture” among older Americans, complete with distinctive interpersonal relationships, activities, and problems. Within this subculture, Rose maintained, mid-century seniors were developing a “group consciousness” based on “self-conception” and “mutual identification.”⁴³⁷

436. See chapter three for further discussion of peer-group culture within various retirement community settings.

437. Talcott Parsons, “The Cultural Background of Today's Aged,” in Donahue and Tibbitts, eds, *Politics of Age*, 9-11; Arnold Rose, “Organizations of the Elderly: Political Implications,” in Donahue and Tibbitts, eds,

Seniors' letters to Senator Smathers and Congressman Pepper reflected this burgeoning sense of group identity. In addition to writing on behalf of elderly friends and neighbors, correspondents frequently described their personal problems and the special needs of "senior citizens" interchangeably. "Me" and "I" became a more universal "us" and "we" throughout many letters. "Please don't think that I don't appreciate all that the state of Florida is doing for us elderly people," Corinne Caudle assured Congressman Pepper in a letter requesting an increase in her state welfare check. "I will be eighty-five years old on April 14," she concluded, "Please do your part to make our last days happier."⁴³⁸ Arthur Hall similarly conflated his problems with those of all older Americans: "I'm writing this letter in regards to my Social Security. I get \$52.90 a month ... [It's] not near enough to live on with everything so high ... It's pretty rough going for the elderly people, my wife and myself." Hall concluded his letter by asking for Pepper's assistance "by putting in a bill to raise us old folks' Social Security."⁴³⁹ When Ernest Hill retired to Florida in the hopes of improving his health, he soon discovered that the state's welfare department would not provide medical assistance to new residents. In a series of letters to Senator Smathers, Hill related his personal problems and suggested changes on behalf of all seniors: "I want to thank you for trying to help me ... It seems that I am not eligible until I have resided here for five years, but I can pay taxes, other dues, etcetera – very inconsistent, I'd say. I hope you will do all you can to help pass the bill to increase social security payments by twenty percent as well as all other laws to help us old people. I think we need the Medicare ... Us older people need help when

Politics of Age, 138, 141; Arnold Rose, "The Subculture of Aging: A Framework for Research in Social Gerontology," in Arnold Rose and Warren Peterson, eds, *Older People and Their Social World* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1965), 3-16.

438. Letter from Corrine Caudle, March 20, 1964, Series 301, Box 213, Folder 1, Claude Pepper Library.

439. Letter from Arthur Hall, July 7, 1964, Series 309A, Box 21, Folder 8, Claude Pepper Library.

we get sick ... I wish something could be done about this.”⁴⁴⁰

Ernest Hill's poor health may have prevented him from actively participating in a senior citizen organization such as the American Association of Retired Persons, the National Council of Senior Citizens, or any one of the thousands of local clubs and centers that sprouted up across Florida (and the rest of nation) throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Numerous correspondents identified themselves as club members, however. These associations – like their retirement village counterparts - cultivated a focused concern about older peoples' problems, thereby increasing senior group consciousness among their mostly white membership.⁴⁴¹ In his important 1960s gerontological study Arnold Rose interviewed elderly members of Minneapolis-St. Paul senior organizations. He compared this sample's responses to questions about their political beliefs and behaviors with those of ninety-four elderly citizens who did not belong to any of the twin cities' old-age organizations. The club members displayed far greater concern for the problems and needs of older citizens. A full quarter of old-age association members, for example, stated that they frequently engaged in peer-group discussions about geriatric health and medical care, compared to a scant two percent of non-group members. This thoughtful group discussion of older Americans' problems seemed to result in stronger support for and commitment to unified senior action. Nearly seventy percent of group members agreed that older Americans “ought to organize to demand their rights,” compared with fewer than forty percent of non-group members. When asked if “older people ought to be more active in politics,” three-quarters of old-age group members responded in the affirmative, compared with half of all non-group members.⁴⁴²

440. Letter from Ernest Hill, May 1, 1963, “Welfare State Board, 1963,” George Smathers' Papers.

441. Term used by sociologist Arnold Rose. See: Rose, “The Subculture of Aging,” 14.

442. Arnold Rose, “Group Consciousness Among the Aging,” in Rose and Peterson, eds, *Older People*, 19-36.

During the mid-to-late-1960s thousands of Florida seniors turned group consciousness into organized action when they wrote letters to Congressman Pepper and Senator Smathers on behalf of the memberships of old-age clubs and associations. Affie Cook wrote to Senator Smathers requesting information about senior volunteer programs at the behest of the newly formed Greater Pensacola chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons.⁴⁴³ More than 100 members of the Senior Citizens' Association of Miami Beach signed a letter supporting Congressman Pepper's efforts to include chiropractic services under the Medicare program.⁴⁴⁴ Esther Williams, President of the Florida Senior Citizens Club of Miami wrote to inform Congressman Pepper of her group's unanimous motion calling for his help in securing Urban Renewal funds for a transportation program to serve area seniors.⁴⁴⁵ Retired Lt. Col. George Adams contacted Senator Smathers on behalf of the more than 250 members of the Retired Officers' Club of St. Petersburg. These men worried about the future welfare of their wives. Adams requested information about government financing for the creation of senior housing for group members. The club wanted to provide elder housing for members and their wives so that retired officers' widows could continue to live comfortably and securely long after their husbands had died.⁴⁴⁶

Miami's Malcolm Ross Senior Center members were prolific letter writers. The campaign to save Dade County's hot lunch program was just one of a diverse number of issues that interested them and they frequently took up their concerns with Congressman

443. Letter from Affie Cook, July 23, 1965, "Senior Citizens Poverty Program, 1965," George Smathers' Papers.

444. Letter from the Senior Citizens of Miami Beach Association, Dec 20, 1967, Series 309A, Box 42, Folder 2, Claude Pepper Library.

445. Letter from Esther William, March 28, 1968, Series 301, Box 99A, Folder 15, Claude Pepper Library.

446. Letter from George Adams, July 26, 1964, "Housing and Home Finance Agency, 1964," George Smathers' Papers.

Pepper. Olga Critchfield, for example, offered the congressman her suggestions for improving the quality of life in local nursing homes. “[I’ve been] a member of the Malcolm Ross Center for five years,” Critchfield explained. “My gripe is, in all of these homes for elderly people, no chapel was built – a card room but no place for an old person to sit with his minister ... No place for a service on a holiday ... How about it, Mr. Pepper? When the next building goes up for the elderly, let’s include a chapel.”⁴⁴⁷ When Bernia Oliver wrote in support of the congressman’s efforts to increase social security payments, she stressed the fact that her letter represented the consensus of more than 300 seniors. “I am a member of Malcolm Ross Center, consisting of approximately 260 members at the present time,” Oliver explained. “I took your newsletter [Pepper’s constituent newsletter] to the center. The president read the paragraph relative to increase of Social Security benefits. There were about 175 members present at that time. There was a unanimous vote ... to increase the payment to \$25 monthly across the board. I have talked with other center members, also many non-members, and all are in agreement. I have talked with senior citizens from nearly all the southern parts of the state of Florida ... From the ones I have talked to, you can say this letter represents 300-350 persons in favor of the \$25 across-the-board increase.”⁴⁴⁸

Malcolm Ross members belonged to Miami’s flagship senior center. Officially opened during the summer of 1961, the center was constructed in conjunction with Donn Gardens, the city’s first public housing complex built exclusively for elderly residents. In addition to providing social, recreational, and educational opportunities, the center offered innovative services such as health maintenance and counseling programs.⁴⁴⁹ The Malcolm Ross Center

447. Letter from Olga Critchfield, Nov 25, 1967, Series 301, Box 99A, Folder 15, Claude Pepper Library.

448. Letter from Bernia Oliver, Feb 11, 1964, Series 309A, Box 16, Folder 8, Claude Pepper Library.

449. Louis Bernstein, “An Analysis of the ‘Leaders’ and ‘Non-Leaders’ of the Malcolm Ross Day Center for Senior Citizens,” (Master’s thesis, School of Social Work, Florida State University, 1964), 18-19; George Raspa,

proved tremendously successful and the county soon opened additional centers across the metropolitan area. By 1969 six centers served nearly 5,000 greater-Miami residents.⁴⁵⁰

The rapid development of senior centers in southern Florida reflected a larger national trend. Migrants may have retired to Miami for a life of quiet leisure, but growing numbers of gerontologists and social commentators worried that older Americans had too much time on their hands. Mid-century experts cautioned that retirement deprived older people of “clearly defined status-giving social roles.”⁴⁵¹ Social and psychological adjustment in later life depended on the replacement of old workplace and family functions with new interests and activities, they warned.⁴⁵² Well-meaning social workers stepped in to lend assistance. The professionally-staffed senior center, first developed by a group of New York City welfare workers in 1943, soon evolved into an important part of their mission.⁴⁵³ In 1962 the National Council on the Aging described the senior center as a “program of services offered in a designated physical facility in which older people meet ... under the guidance of paid leaders performing professional tasks.” The main purpose of such centers, the Council explained, was to provide retirees with “socially enriching experiences which would help preserve their

“An Analysis of Two Aged Groups Participating in the Malcolm Ross Day Center,” (Master's thesis, School of Social Work, Florida State University, 1963), 22-25.

450. Senior Centers of Dade County, Inc., *A Low-Cost Meals Program for Older Americans: A Research and Demonstration Project, Dade County, Florida* (Miami, Florida: Senior Centers of Dade County, Inc., 1971)

451. Wilma Donahue, Harold Orbach, Otto Pollak, “Retirement: The Emerging Social Pattern,” in Clark Tibbitts, ed., *Handbook of Social Gerontology: Societal Aspects of Aging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 335.

452. For example: Donahue, et al., “Retirement: The Emerging Social Pattern,” 335; Clark Tibbitts, “Retirement Problems in American Society,” *American Journal of Sociology* (Jan 1954), 301-308; R.J. Havinghurst, “Social and Psychological Needs of the Aging,” *Annals of the American Academy of the Political and Social Sciences* (Jan 1952), 11-17; Ruth Albrecht, “The Social Roles of Old People,” *Journal of Gerontology* (April 1951), 138-145; Harold Orbach and David Shaw, “Social Participation and the Role of the Aging,” *Geriatrics* (April 1957), 241-246.

453. Jean Maxwell, *Centers for Older People: Guide for Programs and Facilities* (NY: National Council on the Aging, 1962), 7.

dignity as human beings and enhance their feelings of self-worth.”⁴⁵⁴ By the mid-1960s more than 200 centers served older Americans across the country.⁴⁵⁵

Early proponents of senior centers stressed the importance of professionally trained staff. Apparently, older adults could not be trusted to run a successful center on their own. The National Council's senior center handbook included a cautionary tale of welfare workers' initial efforts to leave retirees in charge of New York's Hodson Center: “The organizers of the project ... having gathered the old people together, expected that they could manage by themselves. They had ... provided them with a more sociable means of passing time, which then seemed adequate provision.”⁴⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the lack of professional supervision led to an uncontrolled clash of personalities and the center's original membership of 350 quickly dwindled to a mere handful of participants. A well trained, professional staff played a key role in any center's success, the guide concluded.⁴⁵⁷

Initially senior centers functioned almost exclusively as professionally-supervised social clubs. Members gathered for staff-organized games and crafts, picnics and birthday celebrations. Although the National Council on the Aging promoted the senior center's capacity to “serve as a channel into community life” and to “demonstrate ... the vigor, capacity, and usefulness” of seniors, the organization actively discouraged staff members from nurturing the “development of older people as a political power grouping overly-concerned with their own welfare.”⁴⁵⁸ Following the guidance of the National Council, and

454. Maxwell, *Centers for Older People*, 7.

455. Raspa, “An Analysis of the 'Leaders' and 'Non-Leaders',” 4.

456. Susan Kubie and Gertrude Landau, *Group Work with the Aged* (NY: International Universities Press, 1955) quoted in Maxwell, *Centers for Older People*, 5-6.

457. Maxwell, 21.

458. Ibid, 23, 74.

abiding by the wishes of most financial donors, many centers remained steadfastly apolitical.⁴⁵⁹ This did not mean that their members automatically followed suit, however.

In 1969 sociologist James Trela observed that although senior centers played an “increasingly important role in the life of the aged,” their “avowedly social and recreational” purpose left the political implications of these institutions largely unexplored.⁴⁶⁰ Indeed, it was the paternalistic and recreational nature of early centers that led Margaret Kuhn to dismiss most senior centers as “glorified playpens.”⁴⁶¹ Charles Odell, Director of the Older and Retired Workers Department of the United Auto Workers' Union reached a similar conclusion. In a speech before the 1961 University of Michigan conference on aging, Odell denounced the “political anesthetization” of senior center members.⁴⁶² Yet when Trela examined the socio-political attitudes and behaviors of senior center members in greater-metropolitan Cleveland, the results were surprising. Frequent participation in these centers appeared to increase members' socio-political consciousness and activity. For example, while only three percent of infrequent senior center participants discussed politics at their centers, nearly twenty percent of members who attended centers more than five times over the preceding three months did. In fact, as seniors' participation in center activities increased, so too did their likelihood of discussing such topics as taxes, and inflation, riots and demonstrations.⁴⁶³ Additionally, when Trela compared senior center participants with groups

459. Pratt, *Gray Lobby*, 44-45.

460. James Trela, “Some Political Consequences of Senior Centers and Other Old Age Group Memberships,” *Gerontologist* (Summer 1971), 118.

461. Hessel, 17.

462. Charles Odell, “Attitudes Toward Political Activities Among the Aging,” in Donahue and Tibbitts, eds, *Politics*, 29.

463. *Ibid.*, 119.

of elders who belonged only to mixed-age clubs and associations, he discovered that the former were far more likely to express interest in joining an organization “designed to get the government to do more for older people.”⁴⁶⁴

Lending further credence to Arnold Rose's claim that age-peer associations bred “aging group consciousness,” Trela concluded that although membership in senior centers and clubs to the exclusion of other mixed-age activities seemed to suggest an older person's withdrawal and separation from the greater society, “this ... affiliation does not dampen and indeed appears to stimulate political involvement.” Trela anticipated that “to the degree that [the elderly] are joining growing numbers of senior centers and other groups of the aged and confining their associations to age peers, they are shielded from cross-generational viewpoints and may increasingly adopt age as a reference point from which socio-political processes can be interpreted.”⁴⁶⁵

As Trela predicted, senior centers increasingly served as a fermenting ground for activism. In New York City, center members battled for zoning changes to permit the construction of nonprofit elder housing. In St. Louis, center participants tackled property tax relief. In Ohio, senior center members concerned by the lack of safety and security for area elders, held local forums on the issue and later shared the information gathered at these meetings in testimony before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging.⁴⁶⁶ In Miami Beach, more than 1,000 members of local centers and clubs collaborated at a 1970 seniors'

464. Ibid., 120-121.

465. Ibid., 119, 123. For additional support of Trela and Rose's premise about the growth aging-group consciousness and political activity, see: William Anderson and Norma Anderson, “A Local Movement at Work – The Politics of Age Exclusion: The Adults Only Movement in Arizona,” in Hudson ed., *The Aging in Politics*, 86-91 and Jerry Weaver, “Issue Salience – The Elderly as a Political Community: The Case of National Health Policy,” in Hudson ed., *The Aging in Politics*, 30-42.

466. Bella Jacobs, ed., *Social Action for Senior Centers* (Washington, D.C.: National Council on the Aging, 1974), vii.

conference designed by and for local retirees. In addition to analyzing older peoples' special needs, delegates discussed upcoming county-wide elections and determined a slate of senior-citizen endorsed candidates and referendums.⁴⁶⁷

In the face of burgeoning activism, the National Council on Aging began to alter its stand on the appropriate role of senior centers. In 1974 the Council published *Social Action for Senior Centers*. The authors of the manual conceded that “centers appear to be entering a period when efforts for planned social change among the elderly will continue to grow ... [We] have to respond with imaginative, multidimensional and well-conceived processes to facilitate this planning.”⁴⁶⁸ Alexander Monro, chairman of the National Institute of Senior Centers (a branch of the National Council on Aging), underscored this position: “With growing realization that 'senior power' is a vehicle for making significant changes in the lives of older people, it seems to me that Center staffs have the option either of becoming vital partners in the processes of social action or of standing on the sidelines, watching the procession pass us by.”⁴⁶⁹

A Common Need? The 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' Poor

By the mid-1970s Alexander Monro, director of a senior center in Indiana, was encouraging senior center members to flex their political muscles in ways that must have made Margaret Kuhn and Charles Odell proud. When center participants complained about proposed bus-fare increases, Monroe suggested that members take action. The seniors formed a Civic Affairs Committee and testified before the city's Public Service Commission to

467. “First Senior Citizens Conference,” *Miami Beach Reporter* (April 2, 1970).

468. Jacobs, *Social Action*, iii.

469. Alexander Monro, “The Social Action Process,” in Jacobs, ed., *Social Action*, 5.

protest the increases. When the Commission approved the price hike, this decision fueled further activism. The mostly white, middle-and-working-class seniors organized a bus fare forum at their center which drew an engaged, multicultural crowd of local elders, including members of the black community. Together, these seniors teamed up with the local chapter of the Urban League, a nonpartisan civil rights organization, in a fight to improve the city's public transportation. Monroe credited this experience with sparking not only political self-confidence among the senior center members, but even more importantly, "a growing awareness of common need ... For the first time in many of our members' lives, the grinding impact of poverty and racism in the lives of older people became real."⁴⁷⁰

In San Francisco, members of the East Bay Seniors Legislative Council – a branch of the Glide Senior Center – also embraced cross-cultural (and multi-generational) unity. These senior activists teamed up with local Black Panthers in a battle against area collection agencies that harassed and intimidated San Francisco's poorest citizens – young and old, black and white alike. When the county refused to release the collection agencies' consumer complaints files, the two groups filed a lawsuit in an effort to make those records public. This action led to further collaboration. Residents of the city's senior housing projects were easy targets in their crime ridden neighborhoods, so the East Bay Council turned to the Black Panthers for assistance. Together, they formed a nonprofit service called Seniors Against a Fearful Environment. Young Panther members provided safety and peace of mind for the numerous elderly housing project residents they escorted on daily trips to banks, grocery stores, and medical appointments.⁴⁷¹

These and other examples of East Bay senior activism filled Glide Center associate

470. Monroe, "The Social Action Process," 2-5.

471. Kleyman, 4-6.

Paul Kleyman with optimism about the old-age movement's ability to build empowering coalitions that crossed class and racial lines. "The time has come for the aged ... to learn how to manipulate the system that holds them down, joining with blacks, browns, women and other oppressed minorities in acting for social change," wrote Kleyman. Recent press reports of radical senior activism, he believed, indicated growing unity among older Americans and the poor and politically-disenfranchised of all ages and backgrounds: "America snaps open the morning news and peers over the coffee cup rim into headlines about an odd alliance between the aged and the Black Panther Party, or about an old woman being arrested at a seniors' protest rally."⁴⁷²

Unfortunately, most retirees did not identify with such stories. Instead, seniors' letters to Senator Smathers and Congressman Pepper indicate that many white retirees remained focused on media portrayals of African Americans as angry and dangerous. During the mid-to-late 1960s simmering African American frustration over the inadequacy of civil rights legislation and war on poverty measures to change the real life circumstances of the urban poor erupted in riots that engulfed black neighborhoods from Los Angeles to Miami. Florida seniors remained transfixed by stories and pictures of fire bombings, looting, and shootouts between aggressive white police officers and gangs of frustrated and underprivileged black youth in cities across the country. Newspaper headlines sounded alarm bells over the growing wave of African American "Violence," "Discontent," "Street Crime."⁴⁷³ These topics

472. Kleyman, 7-8.

473. For newspaper reports of riots in Los Angeles, Newark, and Detroit see: Peter Barts, "New Negro Riots Erupt on Coast," *New York Times* (Aug 13, 1965); Wallace Turner, "Experts Divided on Rioting Cause," *New York Times* (Aug 14, 1965); Peter Barts, "2000 Troops Enter Los Angeles on Third Day of Negro Rioting," *New York Times* (Aug 14, 1965); Wallace Turner, "Discontent and Hate Viewed as Factors in Coast Violence," *New York Times* (Aug 15, 1965); Gladwin Hill, "Coast Riot Area Gets \$1.7 Million for Cleanup Job," *New York Times* (Aug 19, 1965); John Hubers, "Johnston Rebukes Rioters as Destroyers of Rights," *New York Times* (Aug 21, 1965); "Racial Violence Erupts in Newark," *New York Times* (July 13, 1967); Maurice Carroll, "Newark's Mayor Calls in Guard as Riots Spread," *New York Times* (July 14, 1967); "11 Die, 600 Hurt in Newark Riots," *New York Times* (July 15, 1967); George Cable Wright, "Hughes Commends Police in Rioting," *New York*

consumed the attention of many of the elderly constituents who wrote to Claude Pepper and George Smathers requesting additional support for seniors, while at the same time condemning federal programs that assisted African Americans and other minority groups. These letters reflect the unsettling reality of deep-seated racism among large numbers of white twentieth-century seniors.

In 1964, for example, seventy-one-year-old Mamie Parker wrote to Senator Smathers complaining about the inadequacy of her Social Security and welfare checks. Her initial plea for assistance, however, soon turned into a diatribe against African Americans. “I’ve read too much about ... this Negro mess,” she seethed. “I know when this mess first began anyone not blind could see how these Negroes would drive fine cars and never work ... They will beg, steal, or go hungry before they will work ... Now they want to take over.”⁴⁷⁴ Mildred Cheek also submerged her request for Social Security increases within a lengthy rant about the injustices of the Civil Rights bill and the dangers that African Americans posed to white citizens. “Why do the Negroes do so many acts of violence and kill so many white people?” asked Cheek. “All the violence the Negroes have caused in St. Augustine is a disgrace to Florida and the United States and to all mankind. I am praying that there will be some change in the Civil Rights bill. That is, I hope the Negroes will not have all the rights and the whites have none.”⁴⁷⁵ Retiree Thelma Baker felt similarly distressed by the changing nature of race

Times (Aug 15, 1969); “Detroit is Swept by Rioting and Fires,” *New York Times* (July 24, 1967); Gene Roberts, “U.S. Troops Sent into Detroit; 19 Dead,” *New York Times* (July 25, 1967); Gene Roberts, “Police Battle Detroit Snipers, Firing Machine Guns from Tanks,” *New York Times* (July 26, 1967). For newspaper reports of riots in Miami, see: Martin Waldron, “Young Negro Leaders in Miami Put Large Part of Blame for Disturbances on Policies of the Police,” *New York Times* (Aug 12, 1968); “Miami Riots Laid to ‘Deprivations,’” *New York Times* (Feb 12, 1969); Thomas Johnson, “In Liberty City, Miami’s ‘Harlem,’ Negroes Feel Rising Sense of Frustration,” *New York Times* (June 29, 1969); Thomas Johnson, “Racial Violence Erupts in Miami,” *New York Times* (Aug 8, 1969); “3 Negroes Killed in New Miami Riot,” *New York Times* (Aug 9, 1969);

474. Letter from Mamie Parker, May 18, 1964, “Social Security, 1964” file, Smathers’ Papers.

475. Letter from Mildred Cheek, June 27, 1964, “Social Security, 1964” file, Smathers’ Papers.

relations. In 1967 Baker wrote to Congressman Pepper complaining about the rising cost of medical care and the inadequacy of Social Security, but her fear and resentment of African Americans soon comprised a significant portion of her letter. "I am a Democrat, but [I will change parties] if Congress and the Senate don't stop our President from giving money to the people that riot and kill our policemen," she warned. "Many Negroes migrated to New York, Washington, and California from farms where they had a good living if they were not too lazy to work. They went there to get a free handout and they did."⁴⁷⁶

White South Florida seniors offered similar, if less vitriolic, assessments of local, state, and federal assistance for Cuban refugees who fled Fidel Castro's communist regime throughout the 1960s and 1970s. As hundreds of thousands of Cubans arrived in Miami, they put tremendous strain on the metropolis' already over-stretched social service programs and many of the area's struggling retirees felt overlooked in the process.⁴⁷⁷ "What irks us here in Miami is the fact the Cubans land here and are at once handed \$100 to \$250, just like that," wrote seventy-five-year-old Alyce Chappelle. "Is that fair, Senator Smathers, to we who have lived here for years and paid taxes? Isn't there something that can be done for us on Old Age Assistance? I am not living, I am barely existing on \$108 a month."⁴⁷⁸ "The Cubans by the thousands have come over here and our government pays them \$100 a month and most of

476. Letter from Thelma Baker, Dec 1, 1967, Series 309A, Box 35, Folder 2, Pepper Library.

477. Robert Ortiz, "Claude Pepper's Fight Against Economic Dependency of Children and Families, Including Cuban Immigrants of the 1960s," (unpublished paper presented at the Allen Morris Conference on Florida and the Atlantic World, Florida State University, Feb 2006); Tracy Voorhees, *Report to the President of the United States on the Cuban Refugee Problem* (Washington, DC: US GPO, 1961); Letter to Senator Smathers from the South Florida Hospital Council regarding the medical care of Cuban refugees, Dec 6, 1961, "Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1962" file, Smathers' papers; "'One More Opportunity' in Every City Asked for Cuban Refugees," a press release from the U.S. Cuban Refugee Center in Miami, Florida, May 7, 1964, Series 309A, Box 21, Folder 8, Pepper Library; *Resettlement Re-cap, A Periodic Report from the Cuban Refugee Center – Freedom Tower, Miami, Florida* (May 1964), Series 309A, Box 21, Folder 8, Pepper Library; Don Bonning, "Miami Now 26 Percent Cuban; Hialeah Ranks Second at 21," *Miami Herald* (Dec 4, 1967).

478. Letter from Alyce Chappelle, Feb 22, 1963, "State Welfare Board, 1963," Smathers' Papers.

them are not even citizens of our United States. Is that right?” echoed Arthur Hall in his letter to Congressman Pepper. “Please don't misunderstand me, I have nothing against the Cuban people, but I do feel we elders that were born and raised in this country should be given as much consideration.”⁴⁷⁹ “You know the Cubans situation here ... we feel many are getting checks who don't need it,” argued Mrs. Charles Lee in her appeal to Pepper for increased Social Security payments. “[They are] living in nice homes, riding around in big cars, and they get free medical help. I am not down on the Cubans and don't blame them for leaving Cuba, but it seems our people are beginning to get dissatisfied – several have said to me, 'I voted for this administration, but I wouldn't do it again.’”⁴⁸⁰ “This country gives money away to other countries like crazy. Even the refugee from Cuba gets a handout, but the poor [retired] slob ... gets peanuts – and peanuts is about all he can eat (the shells!),” fumed Frank Redican in his letter to Congressman Pepper, adding, “You know if the over sixty-fives stuck together and voted as a bloc, they could elect anyone they please.”⁴⁸¹

Senior correspondents insisted that unlike Cuban refugees and indigent African Americans, needy elders were “not asking for handouts.”⁴⁸² Although Florida retirees frequently described themselves as belonging to an underprivileged group with special problems, they also wished to draw a clear line of distinction between themselves and other minorities, especially African Americans. Their desire to do so stemmed from a deep-rooted set of racist assumptions. Many older citizens had been raised to believe that people of color were inferior to white men and women. As retirees reached their sixth, seventh, and eighth

479. Letter from Arthur Hall, July 7, 1964, Series 309A, Box 21, Folder 8, Pepper Library.

480. Letter from Mrs. Charles Lee, March 26, 1963, Series 309A, Box 15, Folder 16, Pepper Library.

481. Letter from Frank Redican, July 6, 1966, Series 309A, Box 17, Folder 4, Pepper Library.

482. Letter from Herbert Stanley, Jan 19, 1967, Series 309A, Box 41, Folder 23, Pepper Library.

decades, they were unlikely to suddenly change their long-established convictions about African Americans' abuse of the welfare system. Retirees' own economic realities, on the other hand, could change quite suddenly. The rapid growth of inflation, combined with unexpected medical expenses and dwindling savings, meant that increasing numbers of seniors had no choice but to turn to governmental welfare and social service programs for the first time in their lives. When this happened, many recipients desperately wanted to justify their reliance on such aid, thereby maintaining their identity as “respectable” members of America's white middle-class.⁴⁸³ To do so, retirees compared their own personal histories of raising successful families, paying taxes, and contributing to Social Security during years of steady employment, with news reports and senior center gossip about violent African American youths who looted downtown businesses and greedy refugees who purchased fancy homes and automobiles with government handouts. In retirees' minds, such stories verified their belief in the great divide which separated struggling but upstanding senior citizens from the vast majority of America's undeserving poor.

A Common Fate?: Old Age as 'Leveler'

While these elderly correspondents desperately distanced themselves from other poverty-stricken, government dependents, many twentieth-century gerontologists described the aging process as a social and economic “leveler.” They noted that as people aged, individuals from diverse backgrounds experienced increasingly similar personal problems and circumstances. For example, middle-class Americans who enjoyed comfortable and reliable incomes throughout their working lives were often reduced economic hardship and

483. Clark Tibbitts asserted that the maintenance of middle-class respectability was important to mid-century elderly voters. See: Tibbitts, “Politics of Aging: Pressure for Change,” in Donahue and Tibbitts, *Politics of Age*, 24.

even poverty in retirement. Similarly, elderly citizens of all races and classes endured chronic illness, physical limitations, and age discrimination in the final years of their lives.⁴⁸⁴

“Older adults can be divided into two basic groups – the poor who grow old and the old who grow poor,” explained Rochelle Jones, a speech writer and aide to Congressman Pepper.

“They share a common fate. In a society that fears old age and scorns the old as redundant, they must struggle to provide themselves with the basic necessities of life. Such seemingly simple things as food to eat, a place to sleep, and the ability to get from place to place – things taken for granted by the young – are problems for older adults.”⁴⁸⁵

A number of gerontologists and social critics perceived elderly American's limited access to the reigns of political and social power as another important old-age “leveler.” Sociologist Anne Foner and old-age activist Margaret Kuhn, for example, both emphasized the ways in which access to power waxed and waned throughout the life course. Foner contended that age - like class, sex, and ethnicity - served as a basis of “structured social inequality.”⁴⁸⁶ American social customs and institutions relegated the majority of young and old adults to society's sidelines while middle-aged citizens dominated the political system and controlled familial and occupational activities and decisions.⁴⁸⁷ “Do you want to hear what the old and young have in common?” explained Kuhn with her characteristic sharp wit. “First of all, we are both marginalized out of mainstream America. We are both told, 'What

484. E. Percil Stanford, “Diverse Black Aged,” in Zev Harel, Edward McKinney, and Michael Williams, eds, *Black Aged: Understanding Diversity and Service Needs* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 36. Also see New York City's Office for the Aging description of age as a 'leveler' in Francis Clines, “City's Elderly Fight Ailments and Economics to Survive,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1969.

485. Jones, *The Other Generation*, 118.

486. Anne Foner, “Age Stratification and Age Conflict in Political Life,” *American Sociological Review* (April 1974), 188.

487. Anne Foner, “The Polity,” in Matilda White Riley, Marilyn Johnson, and Anne Foner, eds, *Aging and Society, Vol. 3: A Sociology of Age Stratification* (NY: Russel Sage, 1972), 115-159.

do you know about it? 'You are too young.' 'You are too old.' Second of all, we are both relatively poor. The young have a terrible time getting a job, the old a terrible time keeping a job. Third of all, we are both into the drug scene, though we have different drugs and different pushers ... Fourth of all, we are both in conflict with the middle generation.”⁴⁸⁸

This social and political marginalization of the elderly, combined with the loss of financial and physical well-being that often accompanied old age, led some gerontologists to surmise that the elderly were among the nation's most disillusioned and alienated citizens.⁴⁸⁹ Young adults, after all, looked forward to inheriting the reins of power as they matured. The elderly, meanwhile, could only contemplate the power they had lost. In his analysis of political attitudes and behaviors among young adults and the aged, Thomas Agnello concluded that “the process of aging has the net effect of decreasing feelings of powerlessness among the young, whereas the opposite can be said for the old ... Their sense of powerlessness is the highest of all the age strata.”⁴⁹⁰ Agnello dismissed elderly Americans' continued engagement in the political process through the exercise of the vote (the aged continued to outvote young Americans by a large margin) as little more than habit – the automatic snap of long-established political reflexes.⁴⁹¹ Here too, Margaret Kuhn's social critique drew similar conclusions. She worried that America's political and social systems lulled the elderly into an undignified and unnecessary second childhood, free from political

488. Kuhn quoted in Ellen Goodman, “Lull in the Age Wars,” *Washington Post*, May 21, 1988. Similar comparisons drawn between the political powerless young and old in Perretz, *Gray Panther Manual*, 5.

489. Frank Pinner, “Theories of Political Participation and Age,” in Donahue and Tibbitts, *Politics of Age*, 63-74; David Barkley, “Older People in Political Action: Views of a Panel,” in Donahue and Tibbitts, *Politics of Age*, 76-77; Thomas Agnello Jr., “Aging and the Sense of Political Powerlessness,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Summer 1973), 251-259; John Schmidhauser, “The Elderly and Politics,” in Adeline Hoffman, ed, *The Daily Needs and Interests of Older People* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1970), 74.

490. Angello, 255-258.

491. *Ibid.*, 258.

and social responsibility. “I find a built-in-bias against doing social action, which is true of all age groups, but particularly true of old people,” declared a frustrated Kuhn.⁴⁹² “Many of us [elders] have resigned ourselves to a society which we feel has no place for us.”⁴⁹³

The thousands of letters written by retirees to Congressman Pepper and Senator Smathers, however, contained few signs of resignation or defeat. While disillusionment gripped student activists and growing numbers of frustrated Civil Rights' activists by the close of the 1960s, senior citizens' letters bubbled over with equal measures of indignation and optimism. The radical wing of the senior power movement – under the direction of charismatic leaders such as Margaret Kuhn and Paul Kleyman – offered rallying cries urging senior citizens to unite with oppressed peoples of all ages and backgrounds, including the working poor, student activists, and people of color. By working together these groups could dismantle a political system that for too long bolstered America's wealthy and powerful while throwing bread crumbs to the underprivileged masses. The majority of Claude Pepper and George Smathers' correspondents did not identify with this message, however. These seniors wanted to work within the current political system, rather than rail against it. They had confidence, moreover, in their ability to improve both their own personal circumstances and the future of American retirement through a cooperative partnership with governmental officials. Florida retirees, after all, had enjoyed a lifetime of advantages, including generally unfettered access to quality education and steady employment. They were also experienced members of the body politic. Their participation in trade unions and professional associations, community boards and political clubs had proved fruitful in the past. And while these correspondents may have been recently locked out of America's political and social

492. Hessel, 27-28.

493. Kuhn, “What Old People Want,” 87.

systems, they retained the keys for re-admittance. Their political knowledge and organizational savvy did not suddenly disappear after their sixty-fifth birthdays. These retirees expected – and indeed demanded – that America's political system work for them now, in their time of greatest need.

'Put Some of these Ideas into Motion': Seniors Work the System

Letter after letter demonstrated the fact that thousands of Florida retirees remained politically engaged and efficacious. Correspondents did more than complain about their circumstances and request relief. They analyzed seniors' social and economic predicaments. A large percentage of correspondents enclosed newspaper clippings on subjects they wanted their statesmen to consider. They underlined key sections of news stories and attached personal notes detailing their opinions about the topics at hand. Retirees wrote to Senator Smathers and Congressman Pepper with specific questions about pending legislation. They also proposed their own bills and policies, offered campaign assistance, and asserted their political power by calling attention to seniors' large and growing numbers at the polls.

It is not surprising that some the most frequent and engaged correspondents included local leaders within Florida's retirement communities. Martin Adleman, for example, a member of the Dade County Senior Citizens' Advisory Board,⁴⁹⁴ often wrote letters commending Congressman Pepper for his good work on behalf of retirees and offering his personal assistance. “We see your name in the papers, so know you're on the job,” wrote Adleman in 1963. “To keep you posted on what is happening in your district #3, I will send you from time to time a memo of what your senior citizen voters are doing ... Now I would

494. The fifteen-member Senior Citizens Advisory Board was established by the Dade County Metro Commission in January 1963. Membership was limited to individuals over the age of sixty-two who were “reputable and responsible” citizens noted for their “civic pride, integrity, business or professional ability.”

like your opinion on the following idea: Each week I will send you a list of senior ... voters ... in your district ... who are celebrating fiftieth wedding anniversaries, senior who are on the sick list at home or in hospital ... A card mailed and signed by you personal could make [them] very happy and make them feel close to you. I would be glad to take care of it for you through your Miami Beach office...”⁴⁹⁵

Max Friedman, chairman of the Dade County Council for Senior Citizens and Robert Hamburg, assistant director of Miami's retiree-operated Senior Citizens' Center were also regular correspondents. When Hamburg wanted to promote the newly opened center, he asked the Congressman for assistance. “There are approximately 130,000 senior citizens in Dade County ... [Our center] will offer many services to ... [elders including] free employment [assistance], a blood bank ... [and] various counseling services ... We also plan on having a drug store ... where drugs may be bought very inexpensively as well as a trading post where ... clothing and home furnishings will be sold to seniors at very low prices,” explained Hamburg. “In order to acquaint the seniors of the county with the center, we are in dire need of the names and addresses of these people ... Could you help us obtain lists of retired teachers, railway people or any other lists of people in that category? Also please let me know whether you would be interested in writing an occasional column for the [center's] magazine discussing the problems of the senior citizen.”⁴⁹⁶

Max Friedman's letters kept Congressman Pepper up-to-date on issues of concern to elderly constituents. He also wrote editorials for the *Miami Herald* championing senior causes and applauding the congressman for his good work. Pepper took Friedman's ideas, as well as the suggestions of all of his informal retiree advisors, very seriously. “As I mentioned

495. Letter from Martin Adleman, Jan 7, 1963, Series 301, Box 213, Folder 1, Pepper Library.

496. Letter from Robert Hamburg, Dec 15, 1963, Series 301, Box 213, Folder 1, Pepper Library.

in a previous letter, I am looking into the matter concerning the effect of an increase in social security annuities on welfare grants which many of our seniors are receiving,” Pepper assured Friedman in a reply to one of his many letters. “Max, you know I cherish your friendship and how hard you have worked for me in the past. I look forward to having your support in the coming campaign.”⁴⁹⁷

While a handful of high-profile retirees established ongoing, cooperative relationships with Claude Pepper, the great majority of the congressman's elderly constituents did not head senior citizen councils or coordinate grass-roots campaign drives. These more typical retiree correspondents none-the-less felt confident that their ideas mattered. They too offered detailed advice on policy issues and sometime proposed their own programs. Florida seniors almost always received detailed and thoughtful responses in return, which encouraged them to write a second and third letter, sharing additional insights and suggestions. “Thank you very much for your kind letter of June 20th in reply to mine of June 12,” wrote William Hoffman in one of his follow-up letters to Senator Smathers. “Though I know ... that you are on record for improving the living conditions of elderly citizens ... I am very glad to again read your confirmation of this ... In the meantime, I read in the papers that a raise of five percent of the Social Security payments has been approved. It is only a small amount ... but for the old people every little bit counts ... I hope that is not the final raise and that our representatives in the Senate and the Congress will do their utmost to help the old people. If you are interested,” Hoffman concluded, “I would write to you about some ways of improving the much argued Hospitalization Plan (Medicare). There may be something that could be

497. Letter from Congressman Claude Pepper to Max Friedson, Oct 29, 1965, Series 301, Box 58A, Folder 4, Pepper Library.

adopted in our laws which has escaped the attention of our government.”⁴⁹⁸

Elderly female correspondents shared their ideas as readily as their male counterparts. A letter from sixty-two-year-old school teacher Irene Broderson provides just one example. “Have you ever thought how much it would mean to a widow if she could keep her husband's Social Security in addition to her own?” Broderson asked in one of her several letters to Senator Smathers. “I am a widow and soon will retire. My pension ... will be small. Now, if I could ... get my own social security in addition to my husband's ... which is also small compared with the high price of rent, housing and food ... I might be able to live. Since I helped my husband to earn his social security, I feel that I should be allowed to keep it in addition to my own ... I think the social security laws need some adjustment to meet the present day necessities of living. Kindly let me hear from you ... I do hope you will see fit to put some of these ideas into motion and rewrite some of our old Social Security laws to meet present day requirements.”⁴⁹⁹

When elderly correspondents disagreed with their representatives, they did not hesitate to offer pointed criticism. George Smathers' persistent opposition to “socialized medicine” in the form a national hospital and health care insurance program for the aged angered many elderly correspondents. They deluged the senator with letters of protest, an act that most certainly influenced Smather's change of position in 1965. Throughout the early-to-mid 1960s Smathers voted against initial versions of the Medicare bill, instead supporting more moderate, compromise measures. The senator was a strong proponent of the Kerr-Mills Act, for example, a means-tested medical assistance program for needy seniors which he favored as an alternative to the King-Anderson bill – a program designed to benefit all

498. Letter from William Hoffman, June 27, 1964, “Social Security, 1964” file, Smathers' Papers.

499. Letter from from Irene Broderson, March 19, 1963, “Social Security, 1963,” file, Smathers' Papers.

Americans aged sixty-five and older, regardless of economic status (this precursor to Medicare was finally enacted 1962).⁵⁰⁰

Numerous retirees wrote to Smathers expressing their frustration with the Kerr-Mills Act and chiding the senator for his stand against “socialized medicine.” “I sincerely thank you for all the trouble you have gone to to help me get some Old Age Assistance, but I must say that I was terribly disappointed in Kerr Mills, especially after reading in the newspapers what you had to say - that it was the best approach to Old Age Assistance,” explained retiree W.L. Tyson. “It is no good for me, as what I need is physical therapy ... I have now applied for aid through the State Department of Public Welfare and I am hopeful that I am going to get some ... though not all that is needed.”⁵⁰¹ “As I receive Social Security of \$111 per month, that makes me ineligible for any assistance under Kerr-Mills or any other Florida program whose intent is to assist older people. Is that just?” asked Miami Beach resident, Roy Reid. “Must many old people here die without medical treatment to save our beloved country from that terrible ogre, 'socialized medicine'? Help!”⁵⁰² “If you can recall, I have written to you on several occasions, expressing my admiration of you,” noted Rose Steinberg, the seventy-year-old owner of a Miami boarding house, “But I am critical of your helping to defeat Medicare. I will quote one example of the crying need for it. One of [my] rooms is occupied by a gentleman who was at one time pretty well heeled, but due to business reverses went broke and now has only Social Security. He has had two strokes and it

500. For an analysis of the evolution and impact of the Kerr-Mills, King-Anderson, and Medicare and Medicaid bills, see: Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 93-95; Arnold Rose, “Future Developments in Aging – Perspectives,” in Adeline Hoffman, *The Daily Needs and Interests of Older People* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1970), 449-452; “The A.M.A and the U.S.A.,” *Time* (July 7, 1961); “The Case for Subtlety,” *Time* (July 27, 1962);

501. Letter from W.L. Tyson, Dec 12, 1963, “State Welfare Board, 1963” file, Smathers' papers.

502. Letter from Roy Reid, July 20, 1963, “State Welfare Board, 1963” file, Smathers' papers.

is impossible to get a room in a hospital. It seems when one is poor, no doors are open.”⁵⁰³

In the summer of 1965 Congress enacted Medicare, making access to health care a right for all elderly Americans regardless of income. And this time, Senator Smathers voted in favor of the bill. When he did, the senator may well have had Rose Steinberg, Roy Reid, W.L. Tyson - and the thousands of other senior correspondents who rallied for the measure - in mind. The plethora of letters that flowed into George Smathers and Claude Pepper's congressional offices during the mid-to-late twentieth century reverberated with anger, confidence, and pride, warning these Florida politicians “not to forget the senior citizens.”⁵⁰⁴ Claude Pepper credited such letters as signs that senior power had come into its own. “The letters indicate that the elderly are thinking of themselves more as part of a large and growing group,” beamed Pepper. “They are realizing that they must work together. I think that is progress.”⁵⁰⁵ In a 1977 *New York Times* article on the gray lobby, one of Claude Pepper's congressional aides offered further insight into the persuasive power of senior citizens' letters. That year, when Commerce Secretary Juanita Kreps proposed raising the social security entitlement age from sixty-five to sixty-eight, thousands and thousands of “letters, anguished letters poured into Congress,” noted the aide. And unlike so many lobbying efforts where politicians receive “7,000 postcards that all look alike,” older people took the time to craft “real letters with real address, and that has much greater impact on a congressman ... Suddenly all those demographics become real people.”⁵⁰⁶

While a relatively small number of picket waving senior power activists grabbed the

503. Letter from Rose Steinbeck, Jan 4, 1963, “State Welfare Board, 1963,” George A. Smathers' Papers.

504. Letter from Sam and Bella Walkow, Feb 9, 1972, Series 301, Box 93, Folder 2, Pepper Library.

505. Pepper, *Ask Claude Pepper*, xi.

506. Kathy Sawyer, “Retirement Bill Stirs Volatile Issue,” *New York Times*, Oct . 31, 1977.

headlines and made the history books, it is important not to dismiss the majority of mid-to-late twentieth century retirees who brandished ballpoint pens and stationery. In the 1960s and 1970s numerous gerontologists and radical senior citizen activists saw retirement village residents, golden age club members, and senior center participants as uninformed, apathetic, and even anesthetized members of “glorified playpens.” The thousands of letters which overflowed file after file at the Claude Pepper and George Smathers archives provide a very different picture of old-age politics. By bonding together, Florida retirees gained a growing sense of group consciousness and an understanding that for senior citizens, especially, the personal really was political. These letters attest to the fact that Florida seniors kept close tabs on current events and the actions of their political representatives. When inflation plundered family budgets and social security checks no longer paid the bills, when spouses needed operations and medications threatened to drain savings, when friends needed assistance that distant family members could no longer supply, retirees contacted their representatives. They frequently wrote two or three times, until a problem was resolved to their satisfaction. Claude Pepper and George Smathers understood the importance of their elderly constituents, on whom they depended come election time. A letter never went unanswered. Some constituents presented their congressmen with serious and complicated problems. These matters frequently required Senator Smathers and Congressman Pepper to intervene on seniors' behalf by twisting arms at the state welfare board, the housing department, and countless other governmental agencies. Moreover, these Florida politicians responded to elderly constituents' problems by drafting legislation that improved the lives of all older Americans.

Working in partnership with Claude Pepper, George Smathers, and other

congressional leaders, retirees enjoyed impressive social and economic gains throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to enacting Medicare and Medicaid, Congress passed the Older Americans Act, continually increased Social Security benefits, established a federal-income floor for the indigent aged and disabled, and outlawed mandatory retirement. Unlike other special interest groups, older Americans' benefits generally survived and even prospered under the slash-and-burn, budget-cutting tactics of the Reagan administration.⁵⁰⁷ Political scientist Adrea Louise Campbell points out that between 1970 and 1996 “the average AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] benefit per person dropped by twenty-nine percent ... During that same time period the average Social Security benefit rose fifty-nine percent.”⁵⁰⁸

As the century drew to a close older Americans enjoyed far better financial circumstances than their early-to-mid-twentieth century counterparts. In the 1930s an estimated fifty percent of senior citizens lived in poverty. Between 1959 and 1970 that percentage declined from 35.2 percent to 24.6 percent. By the late 1970s, that figure dropped to roughly fourteen percent.⁵⁰⁹ Moreover, although Florida retirees appeared to care little about the plight of the African American poor, the vulnerable aged of all races and backgrounds made steady economic gains throughout the second half of the twentieth

507. As a 1988 *Time* magazine article noted: “During the Reagan administration, payments to the elderly have risen 35 percent, so that now more than a quarter of all government spending goes to the 12 percent of the population who are 65 or older ...While Social Security remains off limits, Aid to Families with Dependent Children was cut by 19 percent and school-meal programs by 41 percent between 1981 and 1984.” Nancy Gibbs, “Grays on the Go,” *Time* (Feb 22, 1988). See also: Warren Weaver, “Coming of Age: Concerns of Older Americans Add Up to Big-Stakes Politics,” *New York Times* (Dec 6, 1981); Spencer Rich, “Panel on Preserving Social Security Begins Work,” *Washington Post* (Feb 26, 1982); “Disparate Forces Unite on Bill that Helps Elderly,” *New York Times* (June 7, 1988); Andrew Achenbaum, *Social Security: Visions and Revisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 77-99; Andrea Louise Campbell, *How Policies Make Citizens: Senior Political Activism and the American Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 135-137.

508. Campbell, *How Policies*, 136.

509. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 143-144; Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 120.

century. Although most white retirees had only themselves in mind as they urged Congress “not to forget the senior citizen,” the implementation of Medicare and Medicaid and the expansion of Social Security coverage and benefits helped improve the lives of all elderly Americans. In 1965 more than sixty percent of nonwhite elders lived in poverty. By the late 1970s that figure had declined to thirty-five percent.⁵¹⁰

Today roughly ten percent of seniors live in poverty – nearly the same percentage as adults between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four.⁵¹¹ African American, Hispanic, and other minority elders have also continued to make economic gains, though these groups still endure far greater rates of poverty than white seniors. In 2002, eight percent of non-Hispanic white elders lived in poverty, compared with nearly a quarter of older African Americans and twenty-one percent of Hispanic seniors.⁵¹² Members of the twentieth-century senior power movement were comprised mainly of white retirees who felt the bitter sting of economic hardship after a lifetime of relative wealth and social status. Drawing on racist assumptions that made distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor, these retirees often found little reason to unite with African Americans, immigrants and refugees, or members of the working poor. The need to narrow the poverty gap presents a key mission for twenty-first century seniors – a group that is growing increasingly diverse.⁵¹³

510. Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 120.

511. National Caucus and Center on the Black Aged, “How Aging Black America Lives,” (Washington, D.C.: NCCBA, 2005), 4.

512. *Ibid.*, 4.

513. In 2003 eight percent of older Americans were black and six percent were Hispanic. By 2050 these groups will compose twelve and eighteen percent of the senior population respectively. See: “How Aging Black America Lives,” 2.



Illustration 15: Senator George Smathers⁵¹⁴

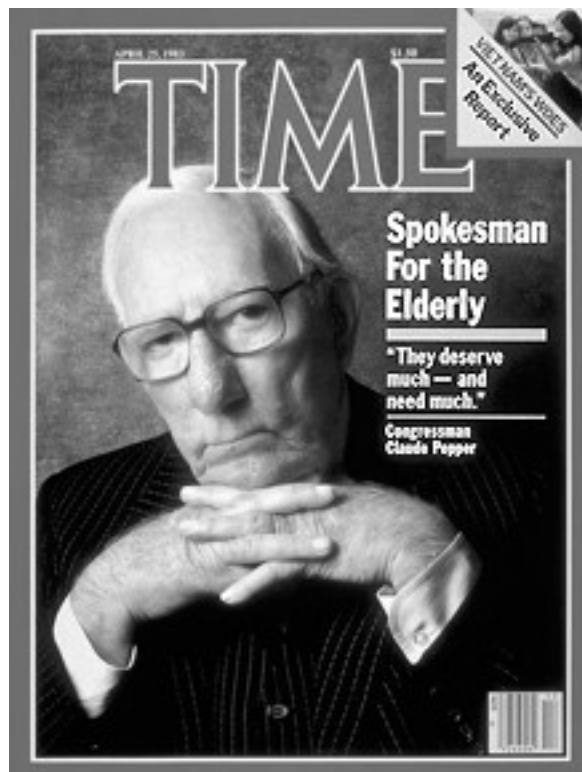


Illustration 16: Congressman Claude Pepper, *Time* magazine cover story, 1983⁵¹⁵

514. <http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/graphic/large/smathers1.jpg>

515. "Spokesman for the Elderly."

PART TWO

WALTZING WITH NONNO: OLDER AMERICANS NEGOTIATE NEW FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ROLES

My sister and I were frequent visitors in my grandparents' Maryland home before they retired to Florida. Grammy babysat us at her house while my mother ran errands or joined my father for a quiet meal. I remember sitting on Grammy's lap as she showed us how to make Chinese lanterns out of construction paper. On hot summer days we pitched in on home improvement projects by "painting" our grandparents' red brick house with buckets of cold water. I felt warm and cozy when Grammy tucked us into the small bed in her sewing room. "Sleep tight. Don't let the bed bugs bite," she whispered before turning out the light.

Soon regular visits with my grandparents were replaced by infrequent treks to Florida. My family's annual vacations to see Grammy and Nonno provided plenty of special experiences and memories, however. We collected sea shells on the beach, splashed in the swimming pool, and enjoyed grown-up dinners at the country club. The club's dining room featured a live orchestra and a large wooden dance floor where elegant older couples twirled and glided. My grandparents were such good dancers that everyone jokingly referred to them as "Fred and Ginger." One of my fondest memories, though, is of quieter a moment. Ready for bed and dressed in long, flowing night gowns, my sister and I learned to waltz in my grandparents' kitchen. "One, two, three; One, two, three," Nonno counted. We imagined ourselves the picture of glamor and refinement as we bumbled barefoot across the linoleum. As we waltzed, we engaged in more than memory making. We participated, unwittingly, in a

post-war renegotiation of family roles and identities, ties and obligations.

Never before had citizens of all ages been so mobile. Young people left the cities for the suburbs. Many migrated out of state in pursuit of higher education and career opportunities. Most older Americans remained rooted in home-towns, but a sizable number retired to Florida, Arizona, and California.⁵¹⁶ As they packed their U-Hauls and headed south, retirees crossed more than state lines. They navigated a new geography of interpersonal relationships. Roles and obligations which made sense when three-generations lived nearby no longer applied to elderly parents, grown offspring, and grandchildren separated by hundreds or even thousands of miles. As migrants settled into new neighborhoods composed largely or even entirely of retirees, moreover, age-based peer groups replaced old work-place and community connections.

Interpersonal roles and relationships changed, moreover, even among elders who remained firmly planted within the old family homestead. Prior to the mid-twentieth-century, most extended families pooled resources and services in order to meet life's basic necessities.⁵¹⁷ By the 1950s increasing numbers of households achieved economic independence. Rising wealth combined with Social Security and other governmental programs meant that fewer families had to rely on one another to make ends meet.⁵¹⁸ As a

516. Gordon Bultena and Douglas Marshall, "Family Patterns of Migration and Nonmigrant Retirees," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 32, no. 1 (Feb. 1970), 89; Albert Chevan and Lucy Rose Fischer, "Retirement and Interstate Migration," *Social Forces* 57, no. 4 (June 1979), 1365; M.F. Nimkoff, "Changing Family Relationships of Older People in the United States During the Last Fifty Years," in Clark Tibbitts and Wilma Donahue, eds., *Social and Psychological Aspects of Aging, Proceedings of the 5th Congress of the International Association of Gerontology* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1962), 408; "A Place in the Sun," *Time* (Aug. 3, 1962); George Calvin Hoyt, "A Study of Retirement Problems," (doctoral dissertation, University of CA, 1962), 24-25, 30, 84.

517. Cheryl Elman and Peter Uhlenberg, "Co-Residence in the Early Twentieth Century: Elderly Women in the United States and Their Children," *Population Studies* 49 (1995), 501-517.

518. Beth Hess and Joan Waring, "Changing Patterns of Aging and Family Bonds in Later Life," *Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 303-304, 311-312; Timothy Brubaker, Charles Cole, Charles Hennon, Anna Cole, "Forum on aging and the Family: Discussions with F. Ivan Nye, Bernice Neugarten and David and Vera Mace,"

result, Americans gained more freedom to determine how and when they interacted with extended kin. Today's family "is characterized by choice – about who to marry, how many children to have, how to conduct interpersonal relations, and so on," explained gerontologist Geoffrey Steer. "This freedom of choice makes family relationships relatively ambiguous. Consequently, the appropriate ways for people to relate across generations are not easy to state simply or clearly, because in a modernized society there are none of the well-understood obligatory family ties and roles characteristic of traditional societies."⁵¹⁹

While extended family members of all ages negotiated new roles, sometimes across long distances, older Americans experienced additional changes within their immediate households and communities. The growth of compulsory retirement and an early conclusion to child rearing,⁵²⁰ combined with Americans' increasing longevity, meant that older spouses spent more time together.⁵²¹ Many relished the role of doting grandparent, embraced hobbies, and reignited marital romance. Older couples encountered numerous challenges, as well.

Depression sometimes followed the loss of prestige that former occupations afforded.

Family Coordinator (Oct. 1978), 437-438; Cheryl Elman and Peter Uhlenberg, "Co-Residence in the Early Twentieth-Century: Elderly Women and Their Children," *Population Studies* 49 (1995): 501-517; J.M. Kreps, "Intergenerational Transfers and the Bureaucracy," in Ethel Shanas and Marvin Sussman, eds., *Family, Bureaucracy and the Elderly* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), 22; Nimkoff, "Changing Family Relationships of Older People," 408-410; "A Place in the Sun."

519. Geoffrey Steere, "The Family and the Elderly," in Forrest Berghorn and Donna Schafer, eds., *The Dynamics of Aging: Original Essays on the Processes and Experiences of Growing Old* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 292-293. Many other post-war scholars stressed this same point. See, for example: Ernest Burgess, "The Older Generation and the Family," in Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbitts, eds., *The New Frontiers of Aging* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 160; Hess and Waring, "Changing Patterns," 303; Brubaker, et al., "Forum on Aging," 437-438.

520. Twentieth-century mother bore fewer children and their offspring married earlier than previous generations.

521. Delores Borland notes that the average "empty nest" period for married couples increased from just two years in 1900 to thirteen years by the late 1970s. See: Dolores Cabic Borland, "A Cohort Analysis Approach to the Empty-Nest Syndrome Among Three Ethnic Groups of Women," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Feb. 1982), 117; Nimkoff, "Changing Family Relationships," 406; Paul Glick and Robert Parke, "New Approaches in Studying the Life Cycle of the Family," in Jeffrey Hadden and Marie Borgatta, eds., *Marriage and the Family* (Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1969), 146-153.

Reduced incomes strained pocketbooks and marriages. Perhaps most challenging of all, retirees confronted their own mortality as they developed chronic disabilities or tended to a frail spouse. When a mate died, the surviving partner's identity as an individual and a family member changed yet again. A widowed elder, long independent, often turned to offspring for assistance, although nursing homes increasingly served as a practical solution. This form of long-term care often proved necessary if an adult daughter worked outside the home or lived at too great a distance to provide an ailing parent with daily care. Although old age is sometimes perceived as a stagnant and uneventful stage of life, it is clear that post-war seniors faced considerable social and psychological adjustments with important implications for both their immediate and extended families.

Grammy and Nonno's retirement community - with its queen palms, wide roads, and spotless lake-side properties - resembled anything but a new frontier. Yet as our plane touched down in Florida each year, grandparents gained increasing attention as the Davie Crocketts of contemporary family life. A plethora of books and articles considered the consequences for families as their senior members forged new roles and identities.⁵²² "Modern society ... has turned old people loose into new lifespan territory, but it has equipped them only with medieval maps," explained sociologist David Plath.⁵²³ "Old people and their families are the new pioneers of our era," agreed gerontologist Ethel Shanas. "They have ventured into uncharted areas of human relationships."⁵²⁴

522. Felix Berardo, "The Family and Aging: An Editorial Comment," *The Family Coordinator* (Jan. 1972), 3; Steere, "The Family and the Elderly," 290; Streib and Beck, "Older Families: A Decade Review," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Nov. 1980), 937; Richard Flaste, "What a Modern Family Faces When Parents Become Grand," *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1976.

523. David Plath, "Japan: The After Years," in D.O. Cowgill and L.D. Holmes, eds., *Aging and Modernization* (NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972), 150. Quoted in Ethel Shanas, "Older People and Their Families: The New Pioneers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Feb. 1980): 9.

524. Shanas, "Older People and Their Families," 14.

The three chapters in this section consider older Americans' changing roles and relationships within their immediate and extended families and communities. "Invasion of the Body Snatchers: Grandparents Changing Place within the Post-war Family" analyses a rising public anxiety which surrounded older Americans' changing intergenerational relationships. Despite a wide-spread hue and cry over the supposed unraveling of traditional kinship bonds, this chapter reveals that the very flexibility of the post-war grandparent role proved to be an asset to the modern American family. "When I'm Sixty-Four: Reexamining the Sexual Revolution, Senior Style," explores an important, if surprising, aspect of senior culture that blossomed inside empty-nest households and across American retirement communities. Haight Ashbury may have stolen the history-making headlines, but older men and women also participated in a dramatic postwar shift in romantic and sexual practices, often times to the dismay of their younger family members. "Bubbes on the Beach: Judaism, Gender, and the Retirement Frontier," explores the ways in which ethno-religious history and culture shaped family relationships and community networks among older Jewish migrants to South Florida. Special attention is paid to the experiences of female Jewish retirees, many of whom served as key leaders and care takers within their tight-knit communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS: GRANDPARENTS' CHANGING PLACE WITHIN THE POST-WAR FAMILY

The Great Condominium Rebellion: Grandma Moses, Florida Retirees, and Growing Post-war Anxieties

The parade of families, like my own, who made annual pilgrimages to grandma and grandpa's house grew by leaps and bounds from the mid-to-late twentieth century. As the miles separating first from second and third generations widened, airports emerged as important family hubs. Busy arrivals' gates provided many children with an initial glimpse of grandparents after months-long separations. "My heart was beating fast ... I couldn't wait to see Grandma and Grandpa and hug them, but there were a lot of people on the plane... and we had to stand in line for a long time," recounts Stacy Zimmerman, the thirteen-year-old heroine of Carol Snyder's popular 1981 children's book, *The Great Condominium Rebellion*. "Finally the line started moving ... Off in the distance the first thing we saw was a bunch of tan faces... Everyone was waving... Suddenly I was smothered by wet Grandma Zimmerman kisses and her wonderful perfume smell."⁵²⁵

In *The Great Condominium Rebellion* Stacy's expectations of her grandparents -- who had recently retired to Florida -- are challenged at every turn. The Zimmerman's brand new Lemon Cove apartment is unfamiliar and sterile. Stacy misses their Brooklyn home "with its steam heat and old books." She is shocked when her grandparents forgo lighting Chanukah

525. Carol Snyder, *The Great Condominium Rebellion* (NY: Delacorte Press, 1981), 5-6, 8

candles in favor of an evening out with friends. She craves the lump-free oatmeal that grandma “used to cook us ... on her old gas range” when breakfast is served at a pancake house instead. Afterwards, the Zimmermans give Stacy and her brother a tour of the neighborhood. “We rode and rode for about an hour, while Grandma and Grandpa pointed out about a hundred restaurants and described their salad bars. They showed us the medical center and the place where you can walk in and get your eyeglasses in an hour,” moans Stacy as the generation-gap grows.⁵²⁶

During their visit, Stacy and her brother befriend a number of similarly bored and frustrated grandchildren. When the youngsters try to play in the Lemon Cove swimming pool and recreation room, they encounter rules and regulations designed to prevent them from disrupting life in the orderly and subdued, adult-only condominium. A grandchildren's rebellion is soon in the offing with Stacy acting as ringleader. The persevering children persuade begrudging Florida retirees to become more open-minded and flexible. Too long removed from regular association with children, the condominium residents finally learn to appreciate young people. By the time Stacy and her brother prepare to board their return flight home, the Zimmermans express second thoughts about their decision to move to Florida. “We're not glued down here,” Grandpa tells Stacy. The book ends on a hopeful note that the Zimmermans may indeed return to Brooklyn. Perhaps the distance which strained intergenerational heart-strings would be closed for good.⁵²⁷

Snyder's story plumbed a growing post-war anxiety surrounding grandma and grandpa's changing place within the kinship system and ongoing fears about the endurance of the modern American family. Cultural stereotypes depicted grandparents as gentle, warm,

526. *Ibid.*, 14-17, 33.

527. *Ibid.*, 25-58, 137-140, 147.

and wise. Like the noble Indian, the “good grandparents” memorialized in these representations remained tradition-bound relics of the past. When modern-day grandparents such as the Zimmerman's complicated Americans' romanticized notions about older peoples' proper family roles, post-war critics subjected them to harsh and contradictory critique.⁵²⁸

The traditional anchors of extended families, grandparents loomed large in the collective consciousness. *New York Times* columnist and freshman grandfather, John Canaday described ideal grandparents as “something special, a combination of parent, playmate, Santa Claus and Methuselah.”⁵²⁹ Anthropologist Margaret Mead waxed poetic over the “indulgent grandmother who loves to have children sitting by her fire, gives them tasty food to eat, tells them stories, and shows them her treasures.”⁵³⁰ In an article in the *Jewish Floridian*, Sholom Weisman remembered his grandfather as “a magisterial figure” with a “white beard streaming like a waterfall.” “It was up to us to give [Grandpa] the attention he craved, as he displayed the fruits of a lifetime of reading and thinking,” Weisman recalled.⁵³¹

America's most popular post-war grandparent donned a black bonnet and brandished

528. W. Andrew Achenbaum and Peggy Ann Kusnerz, *Images of Old Age in America: 1970 to the Present* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute of Gerontology, University of Michigan-Wayne State University, 1978), 20-21; Dorothy Barclay, “Grandma's Dilemma,” *New York Times*, Dec. 10, 1950; Edith Neisser, *How to be a Good Mother-in-Law and Grandmother*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 174 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1951); Dorothy Finkelhor, *The Liberated Grandmother: How to be a Successful Grandmother While Living Your Own Life as a Free and Happy Woman* (NY: Prince Communications, 1975), 22; Edward Ansello, “Age and Ageism in Children's First Literature,” *Educational Gerontology* Vol 2 (1977), 256-257, 268-270; Richard Flaste, “In Youngsters' Books, the Stereotype of Old Age,” *New York Times*, Jan. 7, 1977; Marilyn Rose Parkhurst, “An Historical Study of the Evolving Roles and Status of Grandmothers from the Colonial Era to the 1970s as Reflected in Selected Literature,” (M.A. Thesis, Department of Home Economics, Indiana University, 1970), 27-29, 32.

529. John Canaday, “Notes of a 4-Year-Old Grandfather,” *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1966.

530. Margaret Mead and Ken Haymen, *Family* (NY: Macmillian, 1965), 122.

531. Sholom Weisman, “Grandpa's Fifth Question – A Passover Memory of Long Ago,” *Jewish Floridian*, April 21, 1967.

a paint bush. In 1938 the seventy-seven-year-old Anna Mary Robertson Moses – widely known as Grandma Moses – won national acclaim when an art dealer discovered her nostalgic paintings gathering dust in a drugstore window. Over the next quarter century Moses's depictions of large, extended families engaged in maple sugaring, soap-making, and haying graced living rooms across the country. Americans hung reproductions of her paintings over their sofas and mantel pieces. Millions more exchanged Grandma Moses Christmas cards and purchased china, tiles, and fabrics emblazoned with her “old timey” scenes.⁵³²

Moses' warm, down-home personality was also appealing. The spry old lady charmed the American public by offering plain-spoken, grandmotherly advice in countless television, magazine, and newspaper interviews.⁵³³ “The world seems to be changing from what it was when I was young,” she declared in a 1954 Christmas message published in the *New York Times*. “There seems to be much trouble, and why should it be ... We have plenty of land and could have all the comforts one needs, if we would only do the gleanings.”⁵³⁴ A 1961 *New York Times* obituary of Moses dubbed the artist, “An American Grandmother,” noting that she possessed all “the qualities we like to connect with a grandma. Her kindness was not sentimental, but it was real. She never pretended and she did not care for pretense in others.

532. “Grandma Moses 90; Has Big Party Today,” *New York Times*, Sept. 7, 1950; “Grandma Moses Celebrates 90th Birthday,” *New York Times*, Sept. 8, 1950; “Grandma Moses is Busy at 96; Plans Quiet Family Party Today,” *New York Times*, Sept. 7, 1956; “Grandma Moses is Dead at 101; Primitive Artist 'Just Wore Out',” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1961; Jean McMahon Humez, “The Life and Art of Anna Mary Robertson Moses,” *Woman's Art Journal* 1, no. 2 (Autumn, 1980-Winter, 1981): 7-12; Stephen May, “Grandma Moses Country,” *Smithsonian* 32, no. 1 (April 2001): 68-78; Lee Kogan, “Grandma Moses: Grandmother to the Nation,” *Heritage: The Magazine of the New York State Historical Association* (Date, 2006) 12-23.

533. Archibald Macleish narrated a 1950 Jerome Hill documentary film about the artist and Edward R. Murrow interviewed Moses at her home in 1955 for the popular television documentary series, “See it Now.” Moses graced the covers of *Time* and *Life* magazines in 1953 and 1960 respectively. See: Jack Gould, “TV: American Originals,” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1955; “Presents from Grandma,” *Time*, Dec 28, 1953; “100 Candles for a Gay Lady,” *Life*, Sept. 19, 1960; Kogan, 20.

534. Grandma Moses, “Christmas Could be Everyday,” *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1954.

She put her honest and lovely spirit into the paintings that won for her, during her late seventies and afterward, an outstanding fame.”⁵³⁵ More than four decades later Lee Kogan, director of the American Folk Art Museum, echoed these sentiments. “Grandmothers offer unconditional affection, wisdom, stability, optimism, and faith in family,” she explained. “During the last two decades of her life, [Moses] took on the persona of our nation's grandmother, and became an icon of Americana as recognizable as Uncle Sam.”⁵³⁶

Post-war Americans celebrated their national grandmother as a living embodiment of the country's rural past, while at the same time rejecting the extended-family homestead memorialized in the artist's work. Moses's farm families bore little resemblance to the modern nuclear family showcased on the pages of *Good Housing Keeping* and *Life* magazines or on popular television programs like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. Unprecedented post-war affluence, the GI Bill's (a federal benefits program for World War II veterans) low-interest mortgages, and the development of affordable, mass-produced tract housing, moreover, allowed growing numbers of working and middle-class Americans to embrace this contemporary ideal by purchasing homes in youth-oriented, suburban communities. These single-family retreats and their trappings – including automatic washing machines, dishwashers, frozen dinners, and canned goods – created little room for grandparents and less need for multi-generational household assistance.⁵³⁷ The growth of Social Security and private pension programs, moreover, meant that increasing numbers of grandparents could also afford to remain independent, whether through the maintenance of

535. “An American Grandmother,” *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1961.

536. In addition to serving as the 'nation's grandmother,' Moses' personal descendants included nine grandchildren and over 30 great-grandchildren. Kogan, 13, 17; “Grandma Moses is Dead,” *New York Times*.

537. For a history of the growth of post-war suburbia, see: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 203-218, 231-271.

the old family home or the purchase of a brand-new condominium with all of its modern conveniences.⁵³⁸

Post-war wealth, affordable new housing options, and the advent of dependable pensions encouraged increasing self-sufficiency among extended family members. So too did numerous mid-century experts who urged young families to free themselves from the interference of elderly parents and relations. Clear emotional and physical boundaries were imperative for proper family functioning, they argued. They described grandparents – and grandmothers, in particular – as meddlesome nuisances, at best, and at worst, as a downright threat to a stable home and healthy child development. Doting and over-indulgent grandparents, for example, spoiled children and destabilized parental authority.

Grandmothers who shared the family home, meanwhile, raised the most concern. Their domineering presence, critics claimed, disrupted gender roles within the home. They infantilized young housewives and emasculated fathers and grandfathers, behaviors which put girls and boys at risk for numerous developmental problems including homosexuality.⁵³⁹

538. Beth Hess and Joan Waring, "Changing Patterns of Aging and Family Bonds in Later Life," *Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 303-304, 311-312; Timothy Brubaker, Charles Cole, Charles Hennon, Anna Cole, "Forum on Aging and the Family: Discussions with F. Ivan Nye, Bernice Neugarten and David and Vera Mace," *Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 437-438; Cheryl Elman and Peter Uhlenberg, "Co-Residence in the Early Twentieth-Century: Elderly Women and Their Children," *Population Studies* 49 (1995): 501-517; J.M. Kreps, "Intergenerational Transfers and the Bureaucracy," in Ethel Shanas and Marvin Sussman, eds., *Family, Bureaucracy and the Elderly* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), 22.

539. See for example: Talcott Parsons, "The Social Structure of the Family," in Ruth N. Ashen, ed., *The Family: Its Function and Destiny* (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 191-192, 200; William Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (NY: Free Press, 1963); H. Volmer, "The Grandmother: A Problem in Childrearing," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (July 1937), 378-382; E. Thurston, "Grandparents in the 3-Generation Home: A Study of Their Influence on the Behavior of Children," *Smith College Studies in Social Work* (1941), 172-173; C.A. Strauss, "Grandma Made Johnny Delinquent," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (April 1943), 343-347; Edith Stern and Mapel Ross, *You and Your Aging Parents* (NY: A.A. Wyn, 1952), 212; Ruth Staples and June Warden Smith, "Attitudes of Grandmothers and Mothers Toward Child Rearing Practices," *Child Development* (June 1954), 91-97; "Grandparents Urged to Keep Hands Off," *New York Times*, Aug. 8, 1956; "Longevity Called a Mixed Blessing: Tension in Three-Generation Family Life is Cited at Methodist Conference," *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1958; Ernest Rappaport, "The Grandparent Syndrome," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 27 (1958), 518-538; Helene Arnstein, "The Grandparent Syndrome," *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1969.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, experts repeatedly warned parents about the dangers of overly-assertive grandparents and urged older Americans to release young family members from their clutches. Yet just a decade later, grandparents faced a rash of completely contradictory criticism. This time commentators descried the loss of close family ties and berated grandparents for abandoning their responsibilities. By the 1970s and 1980s grandparents joined a growing list of culprits – including working mothers and single and divorced parents - accused of fomenting crisis among neglected, depressed, and under-achieving suburban children. Judging from popular accounts, every retiree in America absconded to Florida, far from the youngsters who needed them most. “We have the largest, wealthiest, healthiest group of grandparents ever, and there's tremendous potential there,” noted Arthur Kornhaber, a child psychiatrist and head of the Foundation for Grandparenting. The doctor despaired, however, that too many grandparents selected sunshine over the warmth of family connection. “People in Florida, Arizona say they love their grandchildren, but it's a fake-o thing,” he argued in a 1987 interview with the *Wall Street Journal*. “They don't really know their grandchildren. They don't spend time with them.”⁵⁴⁰

A small number of sociological and gerontological surveys offered a more balanced perspective. These studies revealed that many grandparents remained optimistic about their familial relationships. Rather than smothering the younger generations, seniors enjoyed the independence that modern old age afforded. New personal space and freedoms, moreover,

540. Quote from: Alan Otten, “The New Old: Grandparents Today are Sprier, Sharper, Richer and Plentiful – They Spend More Time Being Friends to Grandchildren; But Major Problems Arise,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 11, 1987; See also: Arthur Kornhaber and Kenneth Woodward, *Grandparents/Grandchildren: The Vital Connection* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press, 1981); Margaret Mead, “Grandparents Have Copped Out,” *New York Times*, June 12, 197; Sharon Curtin, “Grandparents,” *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1973; William Shannon, “Our Lost Children,” *New York Times*, Sept. 10, 1975; Arthur Reinstein, “Segregation by Age,” *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1977; Susan Itkin Sarlin, “A Journey to the Old Generation,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1978; Ghita Levine, “The Search for Bubbe and Zayde: Today's Grandparents are Busy, Busy, Busy,” *National Jewish Monthly*, Jan. 1978.

hardly extinguished extended family ties. Grandparents reported that they continued to enjoy regular contact with children and grandchildren. In fact, many characterized the contemporary grandparent-grandchild bond as stronger and more fulfilling than the relationships they had shared with their own grandparents during the late 1800s and early 1900s.⁵⁴¹

For better or worse, most Americans agreed that grandparents were changing. Few elderly family members resembled Grandma Moses or fulfilled cultural stereotypes about how grandparents should look and behave. Grammy and Nonno sparkled in country-club finery. Others, like Grandma and Grandpa Zimmerman, sported sun tans, pastel pant suits, and Bermuda shorts. Throughout the post-war period, these older Americans and their families worked to redefine multi-generational relationships and obligations. In *The Great Condominium Rebellion* Stacy likens this transformation to stepping into “the middle of that science-fiction movie, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.” “Who are these people living in Grandma and Grandpa's bodies?,” she wonders.⁵⁴²

This chapter explores the ways in which post-war social critics and commentators, academic researchers, and grandparents themselves attempted to answer this question. Their diverse assessments of Americans' intergenerational relationships reveals a more complex reality than is often portrayed in the ongoing hue and cry over the break-down of the nuclear family. Grandparents, it turns out, have remained valuable members of the mid-to-late-twentieth century family in its many and changing forms. In fact, the very flexibility of the

541. See for example: Ruth Albrecht, “The Parental Responsibilities of Grandparents,” *Marriage and Family Living* (Aug. 1954), 201-204; Bernice Neugarten and Karol Weinstein, “The Changing American Grandparent,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May 1964), 199-204; Joan Robertson, “Grandparenthood: A Study of Role Conceptions of Grandmothers,” (PhD thesis in Social Work, University of Wisconsin, 1971; Andrew Cherlin and Frank Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent: A Place in the Family, A Life Apart* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

542. Snyder, *The Great Condominium Rebellion*, 23, 59.

grandparent role has proved to be a tremendous asset to families as they adapt to new circumstances and tackle life's inevitable challenges.

From Clutching Menace to Heartless Deserter: Post-War Paranoia and the 'Grandparent Syndrome'

Snug within the walls of their mid-century ranch and colonial homes, post-war Americans were not as content as television reruns would have us imagine. A number of recent histories demonstrate the fact that middle-class suburbia harbored a host of anxieties.⁵⁴³ Historian Elaine Tyler May argues that the 'traditional' family was a fabrication of the Cold War. Government propaganda and popular culture encouraged the creation of nuclear households - complete with bread-winning fathers and home-making mothers - as a bulwark against Communist infiltration.⁵⁴⁴ Any behavior that challenged the sanctity of this proscribed arrangement was held suspect. As a result, the all-American hearth and home appeared to be under constant siege. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s purported threats included homosexuality, racial desegregation, rock and roll, and juvenile delinquency.⁵⁴⁵ Grandparents also made the list. Many popular psychiatric studies and news reports depicted

543. Numerous studies document the history of anxieties that swirled around the protection of the 'traditional' family. See for example: Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); K.A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Politics and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (Sept. 2000), 515-545; Randy Roberts, *The Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Ronald Cohen, "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U.S. History," *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Autumn 1997), 251-270; Estelle Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (June 1987), 83-106; Stacy Braukman, "'Nothing Else Matters But Sex': Cold War Narratives of Deviance and the Search for Lesbian Teachers in Florida, 1959-1963," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Fall 2001), 553-575; Edward Kain, *The Myth of Family Decline: Understanding Families in a World of Rapid Social Change* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990); Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

544. May, *Homeward Bound*, 9-11, 16-36.

545. Roberts, *The Cycle of Outrage*; Cohen, "The Delinquents"; Freedman, "Uncontrolled Desires"; Braukman, "Nothing Else Matters But Sex"; Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety."

grandparents within the home as problematic because they compromised the autonomy and mobility of the nuclear family.

Although the traditional elders celebrated in Grandma Moses paintings appeared familiar and comforting, many mid-century experts contended that older family members couldn't change fast enough. They described the Moses-style multi-generational household as hopelessly outmoded. Sociologists Talcott Parsons and William Goode, for example, argued that modern industry depended on a flexible workforce unencumbered by kinship commitments. Productive breadwinners needed the freedom to relocate in response to labor market demand.⁵⁴⁶ Successful maturation therefore required that young people sever close ties to parents and siblings in order to form flourishing, conjugal families of their own. Growing up by necessity meant growing apart from one's birth family. "...[S]ons on maturity must be emancipated from their families of orientation and must make their own way in the world rather than fit into an ongoing concern organized around kinship," explained Parsons. Older couples had a duty, meanwhile, to relinquish authority over adult children, who had "a right to independence." Parsons advised aged parents to maintain their own homes for as long as possible. "[For] an older couple – or a widow or widower – to join the household of a married child is not, in terms of the kinship structure, a natural arrangement," he concluded. "This is proved by the fact that it is seldom done at all except under pressure, either for economic support or to mitigate extreme loneliness and social isolation. Even though in such situations it may be the best solution of a difficult problem it frequently involves considerable strain, which is by no means confined to one side."⁵⁴⁷

546. Parsons, "The Social Structure of the Family," in Anshen, ed., *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, 191-192, 200; Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, 369. Sociologist Ralph Linton made similar arguments. See: Ralph Linton, "The Natural History of the Family," in Anshen, ed., *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, 18-38.

547. Parsons, "The Social structure," 200.

Mid-century psychiatrists, psychologists, and pediatricians also favored the nuclear family, which they believed provided the best environment for children. These experts warned parents against the damaging impact of grandparents' regular presence within the home.⁵⁴⁸ In a series of case studies conducted during the 1950s, for example, psychiatrist Ernest Rappaport attributed his patients' "distorted, even grotesque behavior" to an inappropriate childhood identification with a grandparent – a problem he labeled "the Grandparent Syndrome." Children who shared a family home with grandparents faced particular risk because these elders typically usurped parental authority. As a result, children identified with their grandparents instead of their mothers and fathers, whom they perceived merely as older siblings. According to Rappaport, this distorted balance of power spelled disaster for children's psychological well-being. In worst case scenarios, Rappaport claimed, these boys and girls entered adulthood with a number of developmental psychoses including sexual dysfunction and gender-role confusion.⁵⁴⁹

Armed with dramatic patient histories, Rappaport attempted to convey these many "serious consequences of the close contact between grandparent and grandchild." In one case study, the psychiatrist detailed the tribulations a thirty-year-old patient undergoing psychoanalysis for hypochondria and sexual disorders. The man's most serious problem was his "compulsion to call attractive women by telephone ... and introduce himself as a worker for the Kinsey Report ... While interviewing a girl about her bodily dimensions ... and her

548. See for example: Volmer, "The Grandmother: A Problem in Childrearing," 378-382; Thurston, "Grandparents in the 3-Generation Home: A Study of Their Influence on the Behavior of Children," 172-173; Strauss, "Grandma Made Johnny Delinquent," 343-347; Stern and Ross, *You and Your Aging Parents*, 212; Staples and Smith, "Attitudes of Grandmothers and Mothers Toward Child Rearing Practices," 91-97; "Grandparents Urged to Keep Hands Off"; "Longevity Called a Mixed Blessing"; Rappaport, "The Grandparent Syndrome," 518-538; Arnstein, "The Grandparent Syndrome." For a succinct historical summary of mid-century American's preoccupation with grandparent-free, conjugal families, see: Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray: Old Age, American Values, and Federal Policies Since 1920* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1983) 70-72.

549. Rappaport, "The Grandparent Syndrome," 518, 537.

dates and sexual experiences with men, he masturbated.” Rappaport traced the patient's disturbances to an unhealthy childhood relationship with his grandmother. She was a sickly but domineering woman who reared the patient after his mother joined the workforce. Rappaport noted that the bed-bound grandmother was an avid reader of 'true romance' magazines. “The grandson bought them for her and watched her read them by the hour, 'eating up' every word and every picture as if by devouring the young girls and their sexual experiences she were keeping herself alive.” Rappaport shared this patient's story as a warning against children's early and intimate “awareness of old age and the threat of death.” Such children developed a deep-seated fear of death, he argued – one which they tried to evade “by methods learned from the grandparent.” In this case, inappropriate and uncontrolled sexual desires.⁵⁵⁰

Domineering grandmothers were deemed especially dangerous in an era that declared strict gender roles an imperative for a healthy family functioning and a strong democracy. Rappaport noted, for example, that grandmothers who shared the family home often refused to relinquish domestic and maternal responsibilities. As a result, they infantilized their daughters and prevented these fledgling housewives from blossoming into mature, adult women. The psychiatrist also detailed the ways in which elderly matrons emasculated the boys and men of the family. In an argument akin to Philip Wylie's best-selling, post-war treatise on “momism” and the dangers of the apron string, Rappaport argued that fathers – and especially retired grandfathers – appeared impotent in comparison to busy and bossy grandmothers. He claimed that boys raised within such households, without dominant male role models, would fail to grow into strong, self-assured, heterosexual men. “The continuous presence of the grandmother creates a predominance of femininity in the household,” he

550. Ibid., 518-520.

explained. “The father is pushed aside and sneered at ... If the grandchild is a boy, he identifies himself with the grandmother, resists identification with a man, and therefore is unable to function adequately with women.”⁵⁵¹

A decade later a research team at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine drew similar conclusions about the perils grandparents posed to young family members. The researchers' review of patient histories revealed that grandparents loomed large in the lives of individuals treated at the school's child psychiatry unit. “In several cases, the grandmother virtually took over the mother's role of daily care of the child during a major portion of his early formative years,” they reported. The clinicians blamed these familial arrangements for the emotional stress and confusion suffered by their young patients. Some children struggled to choose loyalties among conflicting authority figures. Others felt overwhelmed by the “double dose” of discipline doled out by parents and grandparents.⁵⁵²

Numerous advice books and newspaper columns written for grandparents took their cues from these well-publicized studies. Authors agreed that adult offspring needed their own space and deserved the opportunity to make their homes and raise their families as they saw fit. Grandparental restraint was paramount.⁵⁵³ “If your objective is to meet your grown children and their mates on a footing of friendly equality rather than trying to control them – even for what appears to be their own good – you will acknowledge their right to make the

551. Ibid., 522; Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (NY: Pocket Books, 1942, 1955), 184-196.

552. Arnstein, “The Grandparent Syndrome.”

553. See for example: Barclay, “Grandma's Dilemma”; Dorothy Barclay, “After the Children Leave Home,” *New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1951; Neisser, *How to Be a Good Mother-in-Law and Grandmother*; Charles Curtis, “Ten Mistakes Grandparents Make,” *The American Weekly*, Feb. 10, 1952; Dorothy Barclay, “Three Generations Under One Roof,” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1953; Evelyn Millis Duvall, *In-Laws Pro and Con: An Original Study of Inter-Personal Relations* (NY: Association Press, 1954); Alice Rebertisch, *How to be a Grandmother* (Universal Books, 1954); Martin Tolchin, “Grandparents' Authority on the Wane,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1962; Marilyn Bender, “Youth Puts New Verve in Grandma,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1964; Canaday, “Notes on a 4-Year-Old Grandfather”; Eda LeShan, “Grandma is a Swinger,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1967.

important decisions in their lives,” explained Edith Neisser in a 1954 government-issued *Public Affairs Pamphlet*. “Where they shall live, how they shall spend their money or leisure, how they shall divide their responsibilities, are all personal matters every couple must work out for itself.”⁵⁵⁴ “Remember always that your job of bringing up your children was finished long ago, and that you only make a nuisance of yourself when you try to discipline or judge behavior, even with the subtlest suggestions,” cautioned another author. “This holds for all areas of life, including the way in which they are bringing up their children.”⁵⁵⁵ An October 1961 *New York Times* article offered this advice to older people as they geared up for holiday reunions: “Remember, you are visiting [your adult children] for pleasure and to see their way of life ... Only very minor suggestions should be offered and only in the friendliest sort of ways.”⁵⁵⁶

Many grandparents took this advice to heart. In 1950 the New York City Child Study Association held a series of discussion groups for grandmothers. The women concluded that modern grandparents faced the difficult challenge of learning how to help their progeny without overstepping bounds. “Grandparents are timid about interfering,” the group reported. “I wait until I’m asked,” explained one member.⁵⁵⁷ Grandparents increasingly held their tongues while young parents called the pediatrician for advice about treating baby’s fever or consulted Dr. Spock on the best ways to tame the terrible twos.⁵⁵⁸ “It’s difficult ... to watch a child being brought up in a way you don’t approve of. I see these little brats – God love them,

554. Neisser, *How to Be a Good Mother-in-Law*, 8.

555. Duvall, *In-Laws Pro and Con*, 364.

556. Ehrlich, “Grandparents Are Told to Avoid Parents’ Role.”

557. Dorothy Barclay, “Grandmas Decide How To Be Helpful,” *New York Times*, Feb. 15, 1950.

558. Tolchin, “Grandparents’ Authority on the Wane.”

I love them all – climbing all over the guests ... and I think they belong to the animal kingdom,” one grandmother explained. “Well, I understand I’m of the past generation. I don’t foist my ideas on my daughter, but I do express myself when I’m asked – which is rarely these days.”⁵⁵⁹

Too much dependence on or interference from extended family not only damaged children’s development, it also hindered grandparents’ continued growth. Advice books cautioned grandmothers against babysitting more than once or twice a week, for example. Catering to adult offspring’s more “excessive demands” for child care jeopardized an older woman’s individual identity in addition to squandering her hard-earned free time.⁵⁶⁰

Grandmotherhood “is a fascinating hobby, a splendid avocation,” explained one author. “That is just what it should be. For being a grandmother is not a career ... Everyone needs some enterprise, or cause, or affiliation outside herself and her family.”⁵⁶¹ Older women need to “live lives of their own,” concurred another author. “Only then, can they find the satisfactions that go with development, and avoid the pitfalls that are inevitable in clinging to one’s children for fulfillment.”⁵⁶² The advice literature listed numerous opportunities for older men and women to contribute to society while building independence, self-esteem, and happiness. They might seek part-time employment, attend adult education classes, volunteer for local

559. Barclay, “Grandma’s Dilemma.” For additional quotes from older women on their decision not to “interfere” with their grown children’s families, see: Duvall, *In-Laws Pro and Con*, 174, Irwin Deutscher, “Socialization for Postparental Life,” in Arnold Rose, ed, *Human Behavior and Social Processes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 519-521; Gay Pauley, “Why Not Have a Grandparents’ Day?” *Davis Enterprise*, June 7, 1973; Levine, “The Search for Bubbe and Zayde,” 31-32.

560. Rebentisch, *How to Be a Grandmother*; Finkelhor, *The Liberated Grandmother*, 50-51, 82.

561. Neisser, *How to Be a Good Mother-in-Law and Grandmother*, 25-26. Numerous other advice books and articles stressed the fact that “grandmotherhood is not a career.” See for example: Duvall, *In-Laws Pro and Con*, 160; Barclay, “Grandma’s Dilemma”; Barclay, “After the Children Leave Home.”

562. Duvall, *In-Laws Pro and Con*, 135-136; See also: Ruth Goode, *A Book For Grandmothers* (NY: MacMillan, 1976), 16-16.

welfare and civic organizations, or make new friends through Golden Age Clubs and senior centers.⁵⁶³

Freed from the shackles of the family hearth, grandparents who graced the pages of post-war advice literature bore little resemblance to Grandma Moses.⁵⁶⁴ “Shawls and fireplaces are scarcely characteristic of either the equipment or the habitat of grandmothers,” explained one author. “They are much more apt to be alert, vigorous women with plenty of ideas and energy.”⁵⁶⁵ Older women, moreover, benefited from the fashion and cosmetics industries. Modern grandma fought time and gravity by purchasing “foundation garments which outwit the drag, shoes with heels that lift, dresses with pleasant colors, and enough cosmetics to look healthy.”⁵⁶⁶ As a result, the average grandma was surprisingly “brisk of step” and “shapely.” She might even wear a “bow in her raven, blond, or auburn tresses.”⁵⁶⁷ Today's grandmother “tends to look younger, feel younger, and act younger than most 50- and 60-year olds used to,” observed journalist Marylin Bender.⁵⁶⁸ While grandma and grandpa might serve as occasional babysitters or playmates, mid-century experts and advisors agreed that all family members benefited when self-reliant elders pursued their own interests. Young adults gained maturity, parents maintained authority over their children, and grandparents remained young and vital.

563. Neisser, 26-30; Barclay, “After the Children Leave Home”; Barclay, “Grandma's Dilemma”; Barclay, “Grandma's Decide”; Duvall, *In-Laws Pro and Con*, 351-357; Rebentisch, *How to Be a Grandmother*.

564. For a review of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early-twentieth-century depictions of grandparents, see: Achenbaum and Kusnerz, *Images of Old Age*, 20-21, 28; Parkhurst, “An Historical Study of the Evolving Role and Status of Grandmothers,” 27-34.

565. Neisser, *How to be a Good Mother-in-Law and Grandmother*.

566. Rebentisch, *How to be a Grandmother*.

567. Bender, “Youth Puts New Verve in Grandma.”

568. Ibid.

By the 1970s and 1980s, however, growing numbers of commentators were questioning the wisdom of this advice. In the wake of the sexual revolution and women's movement, many Americans mourned what politicians, the Christian right, and the popular media described as a decline in traditional 'family values'. Critics looked askance at the increasing numbers of couples living together out of wedlock. They were alarmed by the rise in divorce rates, single motherhood, and the entry of growing numbers of young mothers into the work force.⁵⁶⁹ Grandparents also received pointed criticism. America's elders, only recently warned that their over-bearing presence inhibited the growth of the nuclear family, were now informed that their selfish absence encouraged its decline.

Arthur Kornhaber and Kenneth Woodward's 1981 treatise, *Grandparents-Grandchildren: The Vital Connection* typified this rash of new criticism. "The brutal fact is that more and more grandparents are choosing to ignore their grandchildren. In turn, grandchildren are ignoring them," the authors protested. "Where emotional bonds existed, a 'new social contract' is now in place, one which proscribes meddling between families in the same blood line and, like a decree of divorce, establishes 'visiting rights' between grandparents and grandchildren."⁵⁷⁰

Margaret Mead also descried the absence of older adults from children's lives. "One of the reasons we have as bad a generation gap today as we do is that grandparents have copped out," she concluded in a 1971 *New York Times* editorial.⁵⁷¹ In her 1972 autobiography, *Blackberry Winter*, the anthropologist detailed the lasting influence of her own beloved paternal grandmother. "She sat in the center of our household. Her room ... was

569. Falaudi, *Backlash*, 19-27, 229-280; Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise*, 4-7, 128-139, Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 1-3, 149-151, 180-183, 202-204, 215-225.

570. Kornhaber and Woodward, *Grandparents/Grandchildren*, xxiii.

571. Mead, "Grandparents Have Copped Out."

the place to which we immediately went when we came in ... from school,” Mead remembered. “The strength of my conscience came from Grandma, who meant what she said. Perhaps nothing is more valuable to a child than living with an adult who is firm and loving...”⁵⁷² Journalist and old-age advocate Sharon Curtin also cherished the years she spent with her grandparents. Curtin recalled her grandfather's gift for story telling. On long, lazy summer afternoons, he wove tales about “Indians and blizzards and how barbed wire ruined the wilderness,” she wrote. “He made us hear the wolves howl and feel the ground shake as the buffalo stampeded. He made the way our elders had lived intelligible and real.”⁵⁷³

Curtin and Mead, Kornhaber and Woodward, and a host of other social critics worried that too many contemporary children grew up without the benefit of such stories. “I don't understand the trend toward forcing old people out of the picture, the tendency to regard them as finished and free of any obligation to future generations,” Curtin told *New York Times* readers. “I see my parents, and the parents of my friends, approach their grandchildren with less spontaneity and less sureness. They do not seem to feel that they are a resource but only that they must not be a burden. They say they are happy with very little contact with the new generation--an occasional holiday visit or a birthday telephone call.”⁵⁷⁴ Journalist Arthur Reinstein observed how few elders inhabited his suburban neighborhood. He surmised that children growing up in such spaces might well believe that “people disappear when they reach a magic point in time, like 60 years old.”⁵⁷⁵ Social worker Susan Sarlin's seven-year-old son confirmed Reinstein's suspicion. Sarlin noted with distress her son's

572. Margaret Mead, *Blackberry Winter* (NY: Morrow, 1972), 45, 54.

573. Sharon Curtin, “Grandparents.”

574. Ibid.

575. Reinstein, “Segregation by Age.”

frustrated reaction after spotting an elderly neighbor shoveling snow. “How come he isn't in Florida with all the other old people?,” he muttered.⁵⁷⁶ Popular commentator and newspaper editor William Shannon linked the rise of juvenile delinquency, poor school performance, and teenage counter-culture to family decline and grandparents' increasing absence from children's lives. “‘Captain Kangaroo’ is no substitute for a devoted grandmother,” he argued.⁵⁷⁷

Retired migrants appeared especially culpable. Although young and middle-aged Americans moved farther and more frequently than their elders, critics issued particularly harsh judgments against grandparents who abandoned their old home towns.⁵⁷⁸ Most working-aged adults migrated to advance their careers and improve the economic status of their families. Their decision to leave extended-relations behind was deemed socially acceptable for those reasons. When older Americans relocated, however, they were accused of selecting sunshine and resort-style living over their commitments to children and grandchildren.⁵⁷⁹

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s popular commentaries repeatedly depicted such migrants as emotionally as well as physically remote. “Today's parents often suffer the lack of the large, extended families that bolstered their own parents through the child-rearing years,” explained a typical *New York Times* article on the challenges modern retirees' migration posed to family members. “Grandparents are in Florida. Brother and sisters are in

576. Sarlin, “A Journey to the Old Generation.”

577. Shannon, “Our Lost Children.”

578. Gordon Bultena and Douglas Marshall, “Family Patterns of Migration and Nonmigrant Retirees,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Feb. 1970), 89; Anthony Lenzer, “Mobility Patterns Among the Aged, 1955-1960,” *The Gerontologist* (March 1960), 12-15.

579. A number of commentators made this accusation. See, for example: Curtin, “Grandparents”; Sarlin, “A Journey”; Levine, “The Search for Bubbe and Zayde.”

California and you're here," noted one harried, young parent. "What do you do? Do you phone your friend, Marge, whose own kid is crying all over the place? Do you read every how-to-book in print, listen to this expert and that guru? Where do you turn?"⁵⁸⁰

Sharon Curtin pitied the growing numbers of grandparents who cocooned themselves within a "total 'Peer Group Culture' ... far from the sounds of children laughing." She pinned America's loss of close-knit extended families not only on young, busy suburbanites, but also foot-loose and delinquent grandparents such as these. "I am looking for 'the responsible elders of the tribe.' And I don't think I'm alone in that search," she concluded. To emphasize what was lost, she compared one farm family's relationship with two sets of grandparents. The paternal grandparents shared a homestead with their son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. Together, the generations tended the farm in an "old-fashioned harmony" reminiscent of a Grandma Moses painting. "In the late summer, they are all out in the hay fields," Curtin reported. "What one is too old or too small to do, another does. They fit together, with each other and with the land." The family's maternal grandparents, by contrast, moved to a retirement community in Florida. When they returned north for the holidays, their visits were strained. The retirees had a hard time relating to their grandchildren. They complained about the children's constant activity. The youngsters perceived their maternal grandparents as stuffy and dull. Curtin surmised that the retirees "simply had forgotten how to be with children." She noted that "they had no skills, no stories, no messages for the new generation. They talked about what they were doing, about bowling and movies and who had died, but they had nothing to say."⁵⁸¹

580. Georgia Dullea, "Parents, Not Their Children, Are the Focus of New Centers," *New York Times*, Feb. 19, 1979.

581. Curtin, "Grandparents."

'Angels of Delight': Optimistic Appraisals of the Grandparent-Grandchild Bond

It is easy to conclude that grandparents - continually measured against deep-seated cultural expectations and sentimentalized recollections - could never win. Mid-century psychiatric studies, media reports, advice books depicted grandparents as demanding and meddlesome. Just two decades later these same elderly men and women were charged with nothing less than the desertion of children as growing numbers of social critics denounced America's loss of traditional family values. A number of scholars within the burgeoning fields of gerontology and family studies, however, offered a more optimistic – if far less publicized – assessment of grandparents' place within the modern family. When these researchers asked grandmothers and grandfathers to reflect on their own experiences, the elders noted that they had lost authority over children and grandchildren, but that they favored the freedom, fellowship, and affection they gained in its place. While commentators raised alarm bells and issued criticisms, many post-war seniors appeared surprisingly satisfied by their familial bonds.

Few of the 700 mid-western grandparents surveyed by sociologist Ruth Albrecht, for example, coveted additional control over the younger generations. These mid-century grandparents appreciated spending time with grandchildren, but they also expressed relief that noisy youngsters could be bundled up and sent home. “[The grandchildren] like to stay overnight with me and like to talk,” noted one respondent. “I enjoy having them and they think it's a picnic but I wouldn't want to have them longer.”⁵⁸² Grandparents surveyed in other studies expressed similar opinions. “I do love them. I'm always glad to see them come, but just as glad to see them go,” noted one grandmother in a 1971 interview. “It's sort of a relief

582. Albrecht, “The Parental Responsibilities of Grandparents,” 201-204.

to be able to stretch out and relax!”⁵⁸³ By surrendering daily supervisory and disciplinary duties to parents, grandparents earned space to themselves.

Grandparents' diminished authority also encouraged a new companionship between children and their elders. Grandparents, no longer responsible for punishing children, indulged them instead. “Grandmothers are bicycling, skiing, ice skating, sailing ... and going to ball games with their grandchildren,” noted one observer. “Having raised their own offspring during the worrisome, penny-pinching thirties and the war-time forties, they are deriving a special measure of enjoyment from their second round of association with children.”⁵⁸⁴ Bernice Neugarten and Karol Weinstein's 1964 study of seventy sets of paternal and maternal grandparents living in greater-Chicago revealed that a majority embraced this “fun seeker” style of grandparenting. These elders engaged grandchildren as playmates and partners. They perceived young family members as “a source of leisure activity, as an item of 'consumption' rather than 'production,' or as a source of self-indulgence.”⁵⁸⁵ The authors contrasted this emerging style of grandparenting with the traditional pattern in which hierarchical authority defined intergenerational relationships, with elders assuming matriarchal and patriarchal control over offspring and grandchildren.⁵⁸⁶

583. Robertson, “Grandparenthood: A Study of Role Conceptions of Grandmothers,” 51. See also: Dorothy Finkelhor, *The Liberated Grandmother: How to be a Successful Grandmother While Living Your Own Life as a Free and Happy Woman* (NY: Prince Communications, 1975), 11; Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 56-57; Steere, “The Family and the Elderly,” 295.

584. Bender, “Youth Puts New Verve in Grandma.” Also see Duvall, *In-Laws Pro and Con*, 147.

585. Neugarten and Weinstein, “The Changing American Grandparent,” 202-203. Sociologist M.F. Nimcoff draws similar conclusions. See: M.F. Nimcoff, “Changing Family Relationships of Older People in the United States During the Last 50 Years,” in Clark Tibbitts and Wilma Donahue, eds., *Social and Psychological Aspects of Aging, Proceedings of the 5th Congress of the International Association of Gerontology* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1962), 411-412.

586. Neugarten and Weinstein, 203. For further comparison of the historically “dominant” grandparent with that of the emerging “permissive” grandparent, see: Rosamonde Boyd, “The Valued Grandparent: A changing Social Role,” in Wilma Donahue, Joyce Kornbluh, and Lawrence Power, eds., *Living in the Multigenerational Family: Occasional Papers in Gerontology* (Ann Arbor: Institute of Gerontology, 1969), 90-91

Grandparents interviewed during the early 1980s for Andrew Cherlin and Frank Furstenberg's nation-wide study drew similar comparisons. One interviewee remembered her grandmother as "old and strict." "We weren't allowed to sass her. I guess that was the whole trouble. No matter what she did to you, you had to take it." The respondent's relationship with her own grandchildren, by contrast, was relaxed and easy-going. "If my grandchildren have something to say, they'll come up and say it. I mean, they won't hold back."⁵⁸⁷ "My grandmother was a matriarch. There's no comparison whatsoever between the grandmothers of the previous days and now," noted another interviewee. "Our grandmother was the queen of the family. We looked up to her. She wasn't mean – she was good, she was kind – but she was the boss of the family. I am not the boss... With my grandchildren, it is companionship. I'm their pal ... I think these days are much happier."⁵⁸⁸

Cherlin and Furstenberg's research removed the rose-colored glasses that tinted too many late-twentieth accounts about grandparents in the good-old-days. Multi-generational families were not uniformly happy or cooperative. Nor did living in the company of one's grandparents necessarily create emotional closeness.⁵⁸⁹ Many extended-family households did not even include children. Elderly parents frequently shared a home with an unmarried adult daughter while grandchildren resided elsewhere.⁵⁹⁰ Older people, moreover, simply had less time for grandchildren. Most labored to the end of life and died earlier than modern-day

587. Ibid, 36.

588. Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 7-8.

589. Ibid., 30-1, 205-6. Sociologist Geoffrey Steere ("The Family and the Elderly," 289) and Beth Hess and Joan Waring ("Changing Patterns of Aging and Family Bonds," 303) make similar assessments.

590. Elman and Uhlenberg note that most adult children did not live with their parents. By the age of thirty-five, fewer than ten percent of adults shared a home with a parent. See: Elman and Uhlenberg, "Co-Residence," 501-517; Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 30-1.

seniors.⁵⁹¹ Large families left some grandparents distracted by the rearing of their own offspring.⁵⁹² Bevy of grand-babies also made it difficult for grandparents to pay special attention to individual children. “My mother was one of nine children. I was one of twenty grandchildren. So there were many,” recalled one interviewee. “Well, today we have a limited number, and every one counts. So there's closeness.”⁵⁹³

Although family scholars focused disproportionately on grandmothers, a handful of studies noted that post-war grandfathers experienced a particularly dramatic shift in inter-generational relationships.⁵⁹⁴ After all, most early-to-mid-twentieth-century men perceived themselves first and foremost as family bread-winners. They devoted long hours to the company office or the family farm. The First and Second World Wars as well as the Great Depression also kept fathers away from home for extended periods of time. As a result, mothers attended to children's daily needs while fathers joined families for evening meals and weekend activities.⁵⁹⁵ As they grew older, many of these men welcomed grandfatherhood and retirement as a second chance to devote more time to children.

Grandfatherhood gave men the opportunity to express a sometimes long-suppressed tenderness. In addition to rough-housing or playing ball with youngsters, grandfathers fed, strolled, and cuddled grand-babies. Sociologist Ruth Shonle Calvan argued that post-war

591. Ibid., 25-26, 31-32; Nimkoff, “Changing Family Relationships,” 410-411. Steere (“The Family and the Elderly,” 292) notes that in 1981 seventy-five percent of ten-year old children had at least two living grandparents. Thirty-eight percent had three or more living grandparents. In the early 1900s, by comparison, only forty-percent had two living grandparents and a mere ten-percent had three or more living grandparents.

592. Cherlin and Furstenberg., *The New American Grandparent*, 27-28.

593. Ibid, 8. Nimcoff (“Changing Family Relationships,” 410-111) also makes this point.

594. Sylvia Clavan, “The Impact of Social Class and Social Trend on the Role of Grandparent,” *Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 353; Neugarten and Weinstein, “The Changing American Grandparent,” 204.

595. Deutscher, “Socialization for Postparental Life,” 515-519.

grandfathers developed a “slightly masculine grandmother self-image” because a maternal-style of grandparenting dominated cultural expectations. While mid-century analysts such as Arthur Rubenstein most likely would have condemned such gender-bending behaviors, Calvin argued that grandfathers enjoyed these positive, emotional experiences. While she admitted to the discontinuity between grandfather's softer side and “the man-of-affairs ... role which dominated his earlier years,” the sociologist explained that Americans' reverence for children encouraged older men to embrace this new self-image. “The mere possession of a grandchild bears respect (or even envy) from friends and from society in general. The retired man trundling the baby carriage does not feel out of place,” she concluded. “The baby comes to love the kindly man who helps to care for it, and the hurried mother adds her thanks. Thus the members of the man's social group approve of the self-image and he sees himself reflected on all sides as a good grandfather fulfilling a valued position.”⁵⁹⁶

Far from abandoning the role of grandparent, mid-to-late twentieth-century seniors reveled in it. They enjoyed better health, longer lives, and more free time than their predecessors. They had fewer children and grandchildren and more time and energy to devote to each of them.⁵⁹⁷ Released from disciplinary duties, post-war grandparents indulged grandchildren with an unprecedented outpouring of affection. Grandchildren, meanwhile, provided seniors with a sense of youthful rejuvenation, emotional closeness, and a great deal of pride.⁵⁹⁸ “We enjoy being grandparents. In fact, it is the first real free ride in life,”

596. Ruth Shonle Calvin, “Self and Role in Adjustment During Old Age,” in Arnold Rose, ed., *Human Behavior and Social Processes*, 534-5. See also: Boyd, “The Valued Grandparent,” 99-100.

597. Ibid., 8-9, 27-28, 30-1, 35, 39. Other researchers also addressed these changes. See for example: Nimcoff, “Changing Family Relations,” 410-412.

598. Neugarten and Weinstein, “The Changing American Grandparent,” 200-202; Joan Robertson, “Grandmotherhood: A Study of Role Conceptions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Feb. 1977), 170.

explained one grandfather. “We receive more pleasure out of them than we did from our own. We can enjoy them and yet not have the responsibility for them. When you are grandparents you complete the life-cycle.”⁵⁹⁹ “The successful grandparent will begin by going overboard immediately,” confided a beatific John Canaday in a 1966 *New York Times* article about becoming a grandfather. “He might as well do so even before the sex of the child is known, and I personally found that a great deal of time was saved, as well as a great deal of energy that would have gone into circumlocutions, by referring to the child from the beginning as 'an angel of delight' ... My grandson happens to embody the best features that might have been expected from a union between Pollyanna and Einstein, but it would have made no difference if he had had the aspect of a chimpanzee and the temperament of a hyena. All grandchildren are angels of delight.”⁶⁰⁰

Intimacy at a Distance: The Modified-Extended Family Meets Multi-Generational Needs

While most grandfathers and grandmothers enjoyed ample opportunities to interact with their own 'angels of delight,' they did so increasingly on their own terms. Mid-century psychologists and advice columns cautioned young families against catering to the demands of clingy, elderly parents, but numerous sociological studies revealed that seniors - like adults of all ages - took pride in self-reliance and carefully guarded their independence. The majority of post-war grandparents maintained their own households and considered sharing an offspring's home only as a last resort.⁶⁰¹ Many also scorned the idea of depending on their

599. Marvin Sussman, “The Help Patterns in the Middle Class Family,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Feb. 1953), 23.

600. Canaday, “Notes of a 4-Year-Old Grandfather.”

601. Shanas noted that by the mid-1970s roughly twelve percent of elderly married couples shared a home with adult offspring. Seventeen percent of widowed or single elders resided in such households. By comparison, in 1910 more than fifty percent of elderly women lived with an adult child. See: Shanas, “Older People and Their Families,” 12; Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 158-9; Steere, “The Family and the Elderly,” 294; Elmen and

children for financial support. Very few of the elderly parents surveyed by Marvin Sussman in 1953 or Gordon Streib in 1965, for example, had ever approached their children for financial help.⁶⁰² “I would rather go to the poorhouse first,” reported one respondent.⁶⁰³

Older Americans' increasing desire and ability to maintain independent lives within separate households sparked late-twentieth century concern that grandparents were abandoning familial bonds. Yet despite the popular perception that extended kin no longer made time for one another, elderly parents and their progeny remained in close contact.⁶⁰⁴ As gerontologist Ethel Shanas explained, when it came to establishing extended-family relationships, post-war seniors desired “intimacy at a distance.”⁶⁰⁵ Although they appreciated their personal space, children and grandchildren remained a cherished part of seniors' daily lives. In 1968 seventy-five percent of elderly Americans lived within thirty miles of at least one son or daughter. Seventy-eight percent reported visiting with offspring's family once a week or more, while ninety percent saw extended relations at least once a month.⁶⁰⁶ Family

Uhlenberg, “Co-Residence,” 501-517; Hess and Waring, “Changing Patterns,” 305, 309. Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 187; William Hawkinson, “Wish, Expectancy, and Practice in the Interaction of Generations,” in Arnold Rose and Warren Peterson, *Older People and Their Social World* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1965), 188.

602. Sussman, “The Help Pattern,” 23; Gordon Streib, “Intergenerational Relations: Perspectives of the Two Generations on the Older Parent,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 27, no. 4 (Nov. 1965). 473.

603. Sussman, “The Help Pattern,” 23; Steere, “The Family and the Elderly,” 294. The elderly Midwestern interviewees in William Hawkinson's 1960 study reported a similar preference for financial independence. They stated that they would rather turn to government for financial support than depend on their children. Hawkinson, “Wish, Expectancy, and Practice,” 189.

604. Ethel Shanas et al., *Old People in Three Industrial Societies* (NY: Artherton Press, 1968), 178; Ethel Shanas, “Living Arrangements of Older People in the United States,” in Clark Tibbitts and Wilma Donahue, eds., *Social and Psychological Aspects of Aging, Proceedings of the 5th Congress of the International Association of Gerontology* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1962), 459, 463; Rita Hipley, “Differences in Perceptions by Grandparents and their Adolescent Grandchildren,” (PhD thesis, Department of Home and Family Life, Florida State University, 1975), 18,42.

605. Ethel Shanas, “Family-Kin Networks and Aging Across Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35, no. 3 (Aug. 1973), 508. See also: Steere, “The Family and the Elderly,” 292.

606. Shanas et al., *Old People*, 178.

visits – and especially contact with grandchildren - gained increasing importance to grandparents as their social worlds narrowed due to retirement and the onset of chronic illness.⁶⁰⁷ One grandmother explained, “[My grandchildren have] helped me forget I'm getting older – they keep me from getting lonesome ... They help me forget my problems.”⁶⁰⁸ “I'd be awfully unhappy not to have my grandchildren,” mused another elderly woman. “As I look at some of my friends who have no one, it's terrible. There are so many people alone ... The more people you have to think about, the less you worry about yourself.”⁶⁰⁹ Finally, when older family members' health failed or savings dwindled, they usually turned to offspring. Shanas determined that in 1957 three out of ten adults with a living parent or parent-in-law contributed to their financial well-being.⁶¹⁰ Offspring and grandchildren also furnished frail seniors with vital physical and emotional support that often times prevented or postponed institutionalization. Even family members who provided little hands-on care helped seniors negotiate the nation's growing number of social welfare bureaucracies.⁶¹¹

Younger family members benefited from multi-generational relationships as well. Evelyn Duvall's 1954 survey of in-law relationships drew on hundreds of letters from men and women across the country who praised grandparents' indispensable assistance. Young married couples appreciated their parents' help with babysitting and household chores.

607. Robertson, “Grandparenthood: A Study of Role Conceptions,” 86, 97, 99, 107; Wayne Seelbach, “Correlates of Aged Parents' Filial Responsibility Expectations and Realizations,” *The Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 341.

608. Robertson, “Grandparenthood: A Study of Role Conceptions,” 54.

609. *Ibid.*, 107.

610. Ethel Shanas, *The Health of Older People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 180.

611. Ethel Shanas, “Family-Kin Networks,” 505, 508; Marvin Sussman, “The Family Life of Old People,” in Robert Binstock and Ethel Shannas, eds., *Handbook on Aging and the Social Sciences* (NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), 218-243; Lillian Troll, “The Family of Later Life: A Decade Review,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 33, no. 2 (May 1971), 267; Hess and Waring, “Changing Patterns,” 309.

“When I had the last baby ... [my mother-in-law] came and took over the other three and my housework for the week I was in the hospital,” explained one grateful young mother. “I love my mother-in-law and she loves me,” noted another woman. “Last week, I lived luxuriously while on a business trip with my husband; sleeping late, dining at smart restaurants ... all because mother thought a change would be good for me and she was willing to leave her quiet, peaceful home to come to mine, to cook and clean and wait on three lively youngsters.”⁶¹² Grandparents also stepped in during family illnesses and crises.⁶¹³ “My dear wife passed away after having given birth to my third child,” reported one young widower. “I faced the problem of how the children should be taken care of while I worked ... [My] mother-in-law volunteered that she and her husband would sell their holdings in Nebraska and go with me to California to take care of the children ... they have been doing a fine job of it ever since, without any compensation ... except the love and adoration of my children and myself.”⁶¹⁴

Adult children also received financial assistance from their parents, even though many older Americans lived on fixed incomes. Marvin Sussman's survey of kinship exchange among middle-class families revealed that financial aid flowed most frequently from elderly parents to adult offspring.⁶¹⁵ Older people provided children and grandchildren with gifts and vacations. They helped with private school tuition, down payments on homes, and other large

612. Ibid., 144-145.

613. Robertson, “Grandparenthood: A Study of Role Conceptions,” 91-94; Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 84, 87; Duvall, *In-Laws*, 93-100, 144-148.

614. Duvall, *In-Laws*, 146.

615. Marvin Sussman, “The Help Pattern in the Middle Class Family,” *American Sociological Review* 18, no. 1 (Feb. 1953), 23. See also: Gordon Streib, “Intergenerational Relations: Perspectives of the Two Generations on the Older Parent,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 27, no. 4 (Nov. 1965). 474-5; Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray*, 159.

expenditures.⁶¹⁶ “At today's price and costs of housing you can't expect children who have just finished school to be able to build or buy a house or even live decently in an apartment without help from the family,” explained one parent. “Our feeling is that we have enough money now that we really don't need, and after all, our desires are very few at our age. So why not help the children?” Numerous similar responses led Sussman to conclude that America's suburban, nuclear family was not nearly as “independent or isolated a unit as it is generally thought to be.”⁶¹⁷

Eugene Litwak's 1960 survey of 920 upwardly mobile, middle-class white couples in Buffalo, New York provided further proof that extended kinship ties were alive and well in post-war America. Despite their social and geographic mobility, Litwak's respondents maintained frequent contact with their relatives and identified themselves as members of large, extended families. In addition to regular visits with extended kin, these families relied on their relations for help during times of illness or when a crisis precipitated the need for emergency aid. This “modified-extended family,” as Litwak described it, consisted of “a series of nuclear families bound together on an equalitarian basis.” Unlike Talcott Parson's isolated nuclear family, Litwak's modified extended family continued to provide its members with ongoing emotional, social, and financial support. This remained true, moreover, even when relatives lived a great distance from one another.⁶¹⁸

616. Sussman, “The Help Pattern,” 23; Post-war advice books on grandparenting often included a section on providing financial assistance to progeny. See: Goode, *A Book For Grandmothers*, 119-129; Duvall, *In-Laws*, 93, 349-350.

617. Ibid, 28. Also see: Sussman, “The Isolated Nuclear Family: Fact or Fiction,” 333-340. Shanas drew a similar conclusion. She noted that in 1975 seven out of ten parents over the age of sixty-five reported providing assistance to children and grandchildren. The same number also said that they received help from younger family members. See: Shanas, “Older People and Their Families,” 13

618. Eugene Litwak, “Occupational Mobility and Extended Family Cohesion,” *American Sociological Review* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Feb. 1960), 10; Eugene Litwak, “Geographic Mobility and Extended Family Cohesion,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (June 1960), 387-8. For additional insights about the endurance of kinship ties across geographic distances see: Marvin Sussman, “Relationships of Adult Children with Their

A majority of post-war family scholars like Sussman and Litwak, focused on the white, middle classes. Their work revealed little about the ways in which racial, ethnic, and class differences shaped intergenerational bonds.⁶¹⁹ When researchers took the time to consider family diversity, the increasingly blurry line which separated the nuclear from the extended family all but disappeared. “The dominant American definition of family focuses on the intact nuclear family,” explained Carol Ann Strauss. “For many ethnic groups, however, family has tended to refer to the entire network of aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, all of whom share life-cycle transition points together and tend to live in close proximity.”⁶²⁰ Sylvia Clavan made a similar assessment about the poor and working-classes of all races and backgrounds. She argued that “functional centrality” continued to shape intergenerational relationships among families who struggled to make ends meet. In the face of economic challenges, grandparents routinely protected and reared children, ran busy multi-generational households, and provided vital financial assistance to extended relations.⁶²¹

When researchers evaluated kinship bonds among African Americans, they noted that black families lived in closer proximity to and interacted more frequently with extended

Parents in the United States,” in Ethel Shanas and Gordon Streib, eds., *Social Structure and the Family Generational Relations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 91; Ernest Burgess, “The Older Generation and the Family,” in Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbetts, eds., *The New Frontiers of Aging* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 168-71; Bultena and Marshall, “Family Patterns,” 89-93.

619. Streib and Beck, “Older Families,” 948.

620. Carol Ann Strauss, *Grandparents: An Annotated Bibliography of Roles, Rights, and Relationships* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 91. See also: Streib and Beck, “Older Families,” 948; Carole Woehrer, “Cultural Pluralism in American Families: The Influence of Ethnicity on Social Aspects of Aging,” *The Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 333.

621. Sylvia Clavan, “The Impact of Social Class and Social Trends on the Role of Grandparent,” *The Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 351-355.

relations than most white families did.⁶²² African Americans were also more likely to share multi-generational households. The 1970 census revealed that nearly fifty percent of black families headed by elderly women included members under the age of eighteen, compared to ten percent of their white counterparts.⁶²³ Among the grandparents surveyed by Cherlin and Furstenberg, forty-four percent of African Americans reported that they had shared a home with a grandchild for three months or more. Eighteen percent of white grandparents said that they had experienced this type of living arrangement.⁶²⁴

African American grandparents' close contact with and responsibility for their grandchildren influenced inter-generational bonds and expectations. Cherlin and Furstenberg noted that the black grandparents in their study asserted more authority over their grandchildren and were less likely to joke or play with them than their white counterparts.⁶²⁵ For example, eighty-seven percent of black grandparents reported that they 'often' or 'sometimes' corrected their grandchild's behavior if it included something they disapproved of, compared with forty-three percent of white grandparents.⁶²⁶ The authors concluded that many black grandparents took their disciplinary role seriously because they "saw themselves as the protectors of the family" in a racist society that offered few opportunities or support systems to young African Americans.⁶²⁷ "I have a daughter who lives with me with one

622. Dolores Cabic Borland, "A Cohort Analysis Approach to the Empty-Nest Syndrome among Three Ethnic Groups of Women: A Theoretical Position," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Feb. 1982), 124; Woehrer, "Cultural Pluralism," *The Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 332.

623. Woehrer, "Cultural Pluralism," *The Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 332.

624. Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 130-1.

625. *Ibid.*, 130-1.

626. *Ibid.*, 127-128.

627. *Ibid.*, 129.

child ... This child, when he came to us, he was a small child. He's fourteen now ... I'm going to tell you right now, he is no angel,” explained Mrs. Lewis, an African American interviewee. “He calls me the worst grandmother in the world, the meanest one ... We've got to be very strong with what's out there in this world now, and I've got to keep him – he can get around his mother, but he can't get around me so well.”⁶²⁸

Grandmothers such as Lewis commonly served as commanding figures in black families. While a majority of white grandmothers surveyed in the post-war literature expressed caution about interfering in their children's lives, African American grandmothers frequently reared children and ran households while parents worked. They organized celebrations and reunions, mediated disputes, and set the moral tone for the entire family.⁶²⁹

It is important to note that many black grandmothers gained their authority as family leaders at roughly the same time that they lost the love and support of their spouse. Among both blacks and whites, women generally outlived their husbands. A life time of unequal access to health care and preventative services, as well as socio-economic discrimination which led to greater rates of underemployment and poverty among African Americans meant that black men entered mid-life in poorer health and died at much earlier ages than their white counterparts, however. As a result, in 1970 seventy-five percent of black women over the age of sixty-five were widowed, compared to fifty-four percent of white women. Among both men and women, the the life expectancy for African Americans lagged a nearly five years behind white Americans, at just over sixty-nine years of age. Middle-aged and elderly blacks of both sexes were more likely than whites to die from cardiovascular diseases,

628. Ibid., 128.

629. Clavan, “The Impact of Social Class,” 352. See also: Streib and Beck, “Older Families,” 948; Elmer P. Martin and Joanne Mitchell Martin, *The Black Extended Family* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

diabetes, cancer, influenza, and occupational accidents.⁶³⁰ After black women lost their husbands, extended families almost always welcomed these elders with open arms, where their position was anything but a frail and retreating dependent.⁶³¹ Sociologists Gordon Streib and Rubye Wilkerson Beck admired older black women's ability to support and strengthen families during times of hardship. Such efforts were striking, they concluded, because these women focused their energies on "enhancing the welfare of others" rather than prioritizing their own well-being.⁶³²

Post-war researchers disagreed over whether such devotion to extended family stemmed from African American cultural traditions and expectations or from necessity. Jacquelyn Johnson Jackson argued that black grandparents who housed and cared for young family members did so because "extenuating circumstances" created a strong sense of obligation. Given the opportunity, she surmised, they would prefer the relaxing solitude of a child-free home. "If significant guaranteed annual incomes for families were to become 'the law of the land,' one wonders about the impact upon certain extended family relationships among lower-income blacks," she concluded. "In all probability, they will move in the direction of the middle-class black and non-black families, who seem to rely more nearly

630. Kyriakos Markides and Charles Mindel, *Aging and Ethnicity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 64-5; Nancy Cope and Howard Hall, "Risk Factors Associated with the Health Status of Black Women in the United States," in Woodrow Jones, Jr., and Mitchell Rice, eds., *Health Care Issues in Black America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 44-56; Antonio Rene, "Racial Differences in Mortality: Blacks and Whites," in Jones, Jr., and Rice, eds., *Health Care Issues in Black America*, 31-41; Robert Joseph Taylor and Willie Taylor, "The Social and Economic Status of the Black Elderly," *Phylon*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (4th Qtr., 1982), 295-306; Jacquelyn Johnson Jackson, "Marital Life Among Aging Blacks," *The Family Coordinator*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan. 1972), 27; Ronald Angel and Jacquelyn Angel, *Who Will Care for Us?: Aging and Long-Term Care in Multicultural America* (NY: NY University Press, 1997), 23-24, 40, 44-45.

631. Jackson, "Marital Life Among Aging Blacks," 27; Robert Joseph Taylor, "Aging and Supportive Relationships Among Black Americans," in James Jackson, ed., *The Black American Elderly: Research on Physical and Psychological Health* (New York: Springer, 1988), 259-281.

632. Streib and Beck, "Older Families," 948; Martin and Martin, *The Black Extended Family*.

upon outside services for maintaining kin in need.”⁶³³

Sociologists Dolores Borland and Wayne Seelbach offered further evidence that class trumped race where extended-kinship patterns were concerned. Borland noted that black middle-class families closely resembled their white counterparts. As African Americans gained economic security, many moved to the suburbs, formed smaller families, and were less likely to include extended relations within their households. Rather than depending on the regular assistance of grandparents, these families employed babysitters or turned to day-care centers when mothers worked outside the home.⁶³⁴ Wayne Seelbach's survey of filial support patterns among low-income black and white Philadelphians also revealed few racial distinctions. Black and white offspring provided aged parents with similar types and amounts of support, leading Seelbach to conclude that social class provided a more useful tool than ethnicity or race for explicating Americans' diverse extended-family structures.⁶³⁵

Other scholars argued that African American families of all classes continued to nurture extensive kinship ties. Harriette McAdoo's 1978 study of upwardly mobile black families living in Washington, D.C. and suburban Maryland revealed that middle-class blacks continued to turn to kin for financial assistance when they faced unexpected emergencies and when they purchased homes or made other substantial investments. They also depended on extended relations for help with child care and for ongoing emotional support. The extended families in McAdoo's study visited one another frequently, despite the fact that some

633. Jacquelyn Johnson Jackson, “Marital Life Among Aging Blacks,” 26-27.

634. Borland, “A Cohort Analysis,” 124. Some researchers argued that black families achieved middle-class status because the attenuated ties with extended family. See: Harriette McAdoo, “Factors Related to Stability in Upwardly Mobile Black Families,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol 40 (Nov. 1978), 764; Carol Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

635. Wayne Seelbach, “Correlates of Aged Parents' Filial Responsibility Expectations and Realizations,” *The Family Coordinator* (Oct. 1978), 347.

relations no longer lived nearby. This interaction, moreover, did not decline even when middle-class status was maintained over a number of generations. In light of these results, McAdoo argued that close kinship ties comprised a vital and deeply ingrained component of the emotional and cultural life of black families regardless of class.⁶³⁶

Throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century a number of emerging social trends cut across racial and class lines, further complicating distinctions among middle- and working-class and black and white intergenerational behaviors and ideals. For example, increasing numbers of middle-class mothers joined their working-class sisters in the labor force. Divorce and single-parenthood also grew more common and affected families of all backgrounds. In 1978 sociologist Sylvia Clavan surmised that such pressures might well encourage middle-class families to adopt extended kinship strategies long used by working-class families “as a way of solving ... their own child-rearing problems.” She cautioned, however, that the jury was still out as to whether or not middle-class grandparents would willingly relinquish their many freedoms in order to serve young family members' ongoing needs.⁶³⁷

Cherlin and Furstenberg's examination of middle-generation divorce supported the contention that family crises precipitated old-style kinship bonds, although they offered one important caveat. They noted that mothers generally gained custody over their children after a divorce and as a result, paternal grandparents sometimes suffered a decline in

636. McAdoo, “Factors Related to Stability,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 775. Cherlin and Furstenberg make a similar argument. See: Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 131.

637. Clavan, “The Impact of Social Class,” 354-5; As early as 1954 Evelyn Duvall noted something of this trend. See: Duvall, *In-Laws*, 13. Grandparents of all backgrounds appear to have answered the call when their adult children faced child care dilemmas due to single-parenthood, divorce, disability, and other family crises. Andrew Achenbaum notes that today's grandparents provide the equivalent of between \$17 and \$29 billion annually in the unpaid care of grandchildren. One in eight grandparents provides direct supervision of a grandchild. See: W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Older Americans, Vital Communities: A Bold Vision for Societal Aging* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 150-1.

intergenerational contact. This was especially true when paternal grandparents and daughters-in-law failed to maintain cordial relationships. The bonds among maternal grandparents and grandchildren, meanwhile, frequently flourished in the aftermath of divorce. Maternal grandparents stepped in to provide safe harbor for their daughters' families. They lent emotional support, housed offspring and grandchildren, helped with child care, and offered financial assistance. "Divorce has become a common, severe family crisis," concluded Cherlin and Furstenberg. "But far from uniformly destroying the bonds of kinship, divorce appears to strengthen intergenerational ties along the maternal line. As a result, children of divorced parents may have stronger ties to some of their grandparents than children from non-disrupted marriages have to any of their grandparents."⁶³⁸

Conclusion: Grandparents and The Myth of Family Decline

Whether they resided in their old communities or moved across the country, grandparents' changing place within the American kinship system roused considerable concern throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century. Few post-war grandparents resembled the bespectacled, gray haired elders we imagine from times past. Unprecedented post-war wealth allowed growing numbers of grandparents and their offspring to lead more independent lives inside separate, single-family homes. Airport reunions and long-distance telephone calls often replaced the multi-generational homestead celebrated in Grandma Moses paintings. And yet, for all these changes, intergenerational bonds endured and even flourished.

Many mid-century experts contended that successful families functioned best as independent, isolated units. They encouraged grandparents to give young couples

638. Cherlin and Furstenberg, *The New American Grandparent*, 142-7, 163-164. Quote on page 164.

considerable breathing room and the freedom to raise their offspring according to modern standards. The popular media reinforced this belief. “It is difficult to imagine the Cleavers or the college-educated title figure of 'Father Knows Best' letting grandparents, maiden aunts, or in-laws have a major voice in childrearing decisions,” notes family historian Stephanie Coontz.⁶³⁹ By the late-twentieth century, however, popular commentators reversed course. Pointing to the dramatic rise in working mothers and single and divorced parents, critics worried that the American family teetered on the brink. This time they berated grandparents for abandoning their responsibilities to young people at a time when they needed their elders the most.

In fact, grandparents remained a vital part of American kinship networks throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century. Among the working-classes, grandparents offered extensive help and guidance to families. These bonds were particularly strong among African Americans. A substantial number of poor and working-class black families depended on grandparents to rear children and run households while parents worked outside the home. In these situations, grandparents gained more authority over and respect from young family members than was typically the case in white, middle-class families. Researchers drew contradictory conclusions about the role that grandparents played in middle-class black families. Some argued that as blacks gained more economic freedom, their intergenerational relationships mirrored those of the white middle class. Others asserted that African American traditions created a deep reliance on kin that bound extended families together regardless of socio-economic status.

As members of what sociologist Eugene Litwak dubbed the “modified-extended family,” many white, middle-class grandparents believed that they enjoyed the best of both

639. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 9-10.

worlds. They maintained their own homes and carefully balanced dedication to offspring and grandchildren with a desire to conduct their personal lives with greater freedom. They cherished their privacy and hesitated to interfere in the day to day running of their progenies' households, and yet they kept in close contact with their children and grandchildren. Young families, after all, offered elders ongoing emotional and practical support as well as financial aid when needed. In exchange, grandparents lent a hand by baby sitting and assisting with household chores. They also helped young couples establish their own households and provided offspring and grandchildren with gifts, vacations, and financial assistance. Finally, when a family crisis – such as divorce – diminished the immediate family's ability to cope on its own, grandparents stepped into the breach by providing more traditional and ongoing support to offspring and grandchildren.

Over the last half century, grandparents have responded flexibly to changing family needs and circumstances, yet social critics have continued either to ignore or to raise alarm bells about their roles. Despite substantial evidence to the contrary, a large and vocal group of religious leaders, politicians, and pundits are still convinced that the family is in jeopardy.⁶⁴⁰ The increasing diversity of American families reinforces these fears among those who continue to stake the future on traditional, nuclear households. In addition to divorce and single parenthood, more couples are raising children out of wedlock, either because they choose not to marry, or because the law prevents them from doing so. Today more than four million children are raised by homosexual parents.⁶⁴¹

640. See for example: David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Richard Gill, *Posterity Lost: Progress, Ideology, and the Decline of the American Family* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); James Wilson, *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002); James Dobson, *Marriage Under Fire* (New York: Tyndale, 2007).

641. Vern Bengtson, "Beyond the Nuclear Family: The Increasing Importance of Multigenerational Bonds,"

In a recent lecture before the National Council on Family Relations, acclaimed gerontologist Vern Bengtson explained that “the ‘family decline’ hypothesis is limited ... by its preoccupation with the family as a co-resident household and a nuclear family as its primary representation.” Although families “have changed, they have not necessarily declined in importance,” he argued. In fact, the very vicissitudes of modern life and the growing diversity of family structures so often cited as endangering the family ties - have actually strengthened multi-generational bonds. This proves especially true of ties created among grandparents and their young family members. With their increased longevity and better health, more grandparents than ever before develop relationships with grandchildren that span decades. Smaller numbers of grandchildren, meanwhile, provide grandparents with the opportunity to devote special attention to each child and to provide dedicated assistance to young families. Grandmothers and grandfathers look after children when mothers return to the workforce, provide emotional support to parents and children when families face divorce, receive step-grandchildren with open arms, and offer financial assistance to families facing economic hardship.⁶⁴²

Most mid-to-late twentieth century grandparents resembled neither the baby-rocking, butter-churning participants of Grandma Moses's idyllic multi-generational home-steads nor the isolated and self-sufficient, emotionally distant retirees of Lemon Cove. Instead, post-war grandparents forged their own kinship roles according to individual and family needs, preferences, and resources. Older Americans' creative and flexible adaptation of modern grandparenthood is a testament to the lasting bonds of family – whatever the form.

Journal of Marriage and Family, Vol. 63 (Feb. 2001), 2-4.

642. Bengtson, “Beyond the Nuclear Family,” 1-16. Quotes from page 4.



Illustration 17: Grandma Moses on the cover of *Time* magazine, 1953⁶⁴³



Illustration 18: Moses' "Christmas at Home" depicts a multi-generational household engaged in holiday festivities⁶⁴⁴

643. *Time*, Dec. 28, 1953.

644. Grandma Moses, "Christmas at Home," 1946. Painting appears in the Illustrations section of Grandma Moses, *Grandma Moses: My Life's History*.



LOVING TYRANT—Studies indicate that when three generations live under the same roof, grandma may usurp the parental role and dominate the household.

Illustration 19: This *New York Times* illustration depicts popular post-war concern about meddling grandmothers' impact on young families⁶⁴⁵



LESSER HALF—"Grandpa loses prestige when he has retired and appears to be useless in comparison with grandma."

Illustration 20: Mid-century psychiatrists argued that domineering grandmothers put child development at risk by emasculating the adult men of the household⁶⁴⁶

645. Arnstein, "The Grandparent Syndrome."

646. Ibid.



Illustration 21: In *The Great Condominium Rebellion* (1981), children and grandparents confront a growing generation gap exacerbated by seniors' migration to Florida⁶⁴⁷

647. Snyder, *The Great Condominium Rebellion*, 57. Illustration by Anthony Kramer.



Illustration 22: Despite popular anxiety over changing inter-generational relationships, post-war seniors reveled in the role of grandparent⁶⁴⁸



Illustration 23: Released from disciplinary duties, post-war grandparents indulged children with an unprecedented outpouring of affection⁶⁴⁹

648. Irving Settel and Bill Adler, *Congratulations: You're a Grandparent!* (New York: Citadel Press, 1959), 11. Illustration by Fred Schwab.



Illustration 24: The author's grandparents glide across the dance floor⁶⁵⁰



Illustration 25: The author's grandparents on a family vacation⁶⁵¹

649. Photograph from Margaret Mead and Ken Heyman, *Family* (New York: Macmillian, 1965), 129.

650. Photograph of Alice and Frank DiBlasi. Photograph in the author's possession.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN I'M SIXTY-FOUR: REEXAMING THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION, SENIOR STYLE

When I get older losing my hair,
Many years from now.
Will you still be sending me a
valentine
Birthday greetings bottle of wine.

- The Beatles ⁶⁵²

The Missing History of Senior Sexuality

Most people remember the sexual revolution first and foremost as a movement among young people. Historians highlight the development of the birth control pill, the dramatic rise in unwed parenthood, the decade-long obsession with the sex lives of college students.⁶⁵³ The "flouting of sexual conventions" was an important part of youth culture, explains David Farber. "In 1964 the Beatles topped the hit list with 'I want to Hold Your Hand.' By 1967, they were wailing 'Why don't we do it in the road!'"⁶⁵⁴ Taking inspiration from very different Beatles' lyrics, this chapter explores the sexual revolution among older adults – those

651. Ibid.

652. The Beatles, "When I'm Sixty Four," *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967).

653. Alan Petigny, "Illegitimacy, Postwar Psychology, and the Reperiodization of the Sexual Revolution," *Journal of Social History* 38.1 (2004): 63-79; Rickie Solinger, "The Population Bomb and the Sexual Revolution: Toward Choice," in *American Sexual Histories*, ed. Elizabeth Reis (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 343-364.

654. David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams, American in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 182-185.

supposedly straight-laced seniors on the other side of the generation gap. In working to shatter long-held myths about the age-limits of 1960's-style lust and love making, "When I'm Sixty-Four" offers a reinterpretation of the sexual revolution and the history of sexuality and aging more broadly.

Sexuality in later life is a subject too long buried in the archives. The history of aging has focused on demographic changes, economic trends, and institutional structures on the one hand and broad philosophical questions on the other.⁶⁵⁵ The rich details of older people's everyday lives – including their intimate relationships – remain largely unexplored. Historians of sexuality have also overlooked the complex and changing rhythms of love in the later years. A review of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (1990-present) reveals just one article devoted to aging.⁶⁵⁶ A monograph survey yields similar results.⁶⁵⁷ John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman's *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1988) focuses almost exclusively on the young and middle aged. Elizabeth Reis's *American Sexual Histories* (2001) explores homosexuality, abortion, sex change, and prostitution but does not

655. Examples include: Daniel Mitchell, *Pensions, Politics, and the Elderly: Historic Social Movements and Their Lessons for Our Aging Society* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharp, 2000); Dora Costa, *The Evolution of Retirement: An American Economic History, 1880-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); William Graebner, *A History of Retirement: the Meaning and Function of an American Institution, 1885-1978* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980); Carole Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America's Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); David Kertzer and Peter Laslett, *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

656. Laura Davidow Hirshbein, "The Glandular Solution: Sex, Masculinity, and Aging in the 1920s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9:3 (July 2003): 277-304.

657. Lois Banner's *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power, and Sexuality* provides the sole history devoted entirely to mature sexuality. Banner's prodigious study encompasses three-thousand years of history drawn mostly from mythology and literature. This groundbreaking work offers a fascinating survey of changing Western European and American interpretations of older women's sexuality. Not surprisingly, Banner's sweeping review does not provide readers with a detailed picture of the ways in which changing cultural attitudes shaped the daily experiences of ordinary women and men. Louis Banner, *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power, and Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

include a discussion of sexuality and aging.⁶⁵⁸ Beth Bailey's *Sex in the Heartland* (1999) examines the sexual revolution in Kansas, far from the sensationalized and much-studied free love capital of San Francisco. Bailey stretches geographic boundaries, but her focus remains fresh-faced youth.⁶⁵⁹

Still, Bailey is one of a growing number of scholars who complicate our understanding of the sexual revolution, long portrayed as a free-love frenzy among counter-culture revolutionaries. Historians are currently untangling a complex social and cultural movement composed of diverse and often conflicting groups of youthful thrill-seekers, gay rights activists, feminists, and sex educators, among others.⁶⁶⁰ The time line of the sexual revolution is also in question. New sexual mores and behaviors may have been in full flower by late 1960s, but scholars now trace the seeds of change back to 1950s, the 1920s, and before.⁶⁶¹

This expansion in the chronology and participants of the sexual revolution invites the reevaluation of older Americans' sexual history. Mature citizens were neither benighted innocents nor resentful prudes. The generation that celebrated sixtieth and seventieth birthdays during the 1960s and 1970s had participated in the blossoming of youth culture in

658. Elizabeth Reis, *American Sexual Histories* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

659. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

660. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*; Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 166-7; Jane Gehard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2001); Kelly Morrow, "Navigating the 'Sexual Wilderness': The Sexual Liberation Movement at the University of North Carolina, 1969-1973 (master's thesis, University of North Carolina, 2006).

661. Petigny, 63-71; Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in 20th Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 141; Sharon Ullman, *Sex Seen: The Emergence of Modern Sexuality in America* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1997), 3-4, 137; John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), xiii; John Levi Martin, "Structuring the Sexual Revolution," *Theory and Society* 25 (1996), 105-151; David Allyn, *Make*

the 1920s.⁶⁶² Their's was the first generation to mingle freely with members of the opposite sex at school and in the workplace. They met in dance halls and jazz clubs. They necked and petted. Such bold public displays of sexuality soon came to symbolize youth culture and its challenge to traditional norms and expectations.⁶⁶³ This generation's desire for sex and romance did not wane as youth faded. Nor did these original teenage rebels' propensity to buck the system. During the 1960s and 1970s love was in the air in Haight Ashbury, but it also wafted through American retirement villages. Marriages among older couples were on the rise as were the numbers of seniors "living in sin." Scientific and popular studies pointed to the pleasures of sex after sixty, a topic that was discussed more frequently and openly among older adults than ever before.

At the same time, popular stereotypes about gender, class, and race shaped the perceptions and experiences of mature sexuality. The media depicted older African American women and working-class women of both races as unattractive and undesirable. They remained largely absent from mass-circulation fashion magazines and popular discussions about mature sexuality. Scientific and social discourse on older middle-class white women's sexuality, meanwhile, increased popular anxiety about mature femininity. An abundance of advertisements and beauty guides touted the importance of looking fabulous after forty. While older white women might sustain sexual passion and allure, however, they were not meant to aggressively assert such desires. Those that did risked being labeled neurotic and dangerous. Elderly homosexual men and women were similarly depicted as pathetic and perverted. While all of these stereotypes persisted throughout the 1960s and 1970s, African

Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History (Boston: Little Brown, 2000).

662. Bailey, *From Front Porch* , 9-10.

663. Baiely, *From Front Porch*, 77-88.

American magazines, feminist polemics, and gerontological surveys of the gay community increasingly promoted the acceptance of mature passion in its many forms.

**“My Question is the Unmentionable”:
Senior Sexuality, New Information, and New Opportunities**

Just as John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 1969 Bed-in for Peace used sexuality as potent publicity for the anti-war movement, older adults employed sexual expression in their campaign against ageism. “We're finding old people are very responsive to being radicalized,” declared Gray Panther founder, Margaret Kuhn. “They are an explosive new force.” Disproving the myth that wrinkled skin and graying hair spelled the end of sexual drive and function became an important part of this revolution. Sporting a friendship ring “from a nice old man,” the seventy-three-year-old Kuhn exuberantly exclaimed that “sex is beautiful until rigor mortis sets in.”⁶⁶⁴

Despite the shock value of Kuhn's statement, aging American's new romantic and sexual behaviors were more often the product of practical adjustments to changing circumstances than of social activism. At the close of the nineteenth century, marriages lasted an average of thirty years. Older couples generally shared their homes with offspring, with one partner dying before the last child married and left home. By the mid-twentieth century, earlier first marriages and longer life spans meant that the average couple gained an additional decade together - years often spent as empty nesters.⁶⁶⁵

As aging husbands retired from the workforce and joined their wives in newly child-free homes, couples renegotiated roles and expectations. Renewing love and intimacy in the

664. Rochelle Jones, *The Other Generation: The New Power of Older People* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 233-4.

665. Jeanne Gilbert, “The Elderly Couple,” in *Marriage: A Psychological and Moral Approach*, ed. William Bier (New York: Fordham University Press, 1963), 271-272.

marriage were among the topics that concerned and excited them.⁶⁶⁶ “My question [is about] the unmentionable,” inquired a reader of the nationally-syndicated *Golden Years* column. “I am sixty-two. My husband retires this summer at sixty-three. What new [developments] in the area of personal relationship can be expected when he retires? ... What is normal for people our age?” Columnist Thomas Collins replied that “letters about [this subject] keep popping up.” He reassured readers that “retired people are enjoying the intimate side of marriage into their seventies and beyond.”⁶⁶⁷

Collins was able to answer this and similar questions by drawing on a wealth of new studies on mature sexuality. Alfred Kinsey's wildly popular *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) demonstrated definitively for the first time that aging did not put an end to sexual feelings and intercourse. Kinsey interviewed eighty-seven white men and thirty-nine black men over the age of sixty for his study on male sexuality and concluded that “contrary to general conceptions of the aging processes in sex,” the majority of older men remained capable of sexual performance.⁶⁶⁸ Kinsey's more limited investigation of older women's sexuality drew similar conclusions.⁶⁶⁹

During the 1960s, researchers at Duke University's Department of Psychiatry gathered data on the sexual practices of 254 adults aged sixty to ninety-three. Their study indicated that older people still felt sexual desire, though some no longer engaged in

666. This generalization applies to working, middle, and upper-middle class families which depended on a male bread winner with a wife working at home. In families that could not afford to retire and for families in which older women labored outside of the home, marital attitudes and concerns about sex and romance in the later years may have been quite different.

667. Thomas Collins, “The Golden Years,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, May 28, 1970.

668. Alfred Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1948), 235.

669. Alfred Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, 4th ed. (New York: Pocket Book, 1969), 353, 542, 714, 716.

intercourse for lack of opportunity.⁶⁷⁰ By the mid-1960s Dr. William Masters and Virginia Johnson were not only interviewing older adults, but clinically monitoring their sexual performance. Their study, *Human Sexual Response* (1966), which reached number two on the *New York Times* best-seller's list, concluded that sexual arousal and intercourse were slowed down by, but by no means extinguished with age.⁶⁷¹ Finally, Shere Hite's *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study on Female Sexuality* (1976) included a section on later life. This chapter highlighted frank comments about aging and its impact on older women's sexual experiences from anonymous respondents to questionnaires distributed across the country. These reflections further substantiated the claim that "the capacity to experience sexual pleasure are lifetime attributes."⁶⁷²

Sexologists who studied aging circulated their work in academic journals and conferences. They also shared their research with the American public. In 1964 they helped to form the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States.⁶⁷³ The Council's newsletters educated practitioners and the general public about sexuality throughout the life course. The July 1976 edition, for example, described a therapy program that helped elderly married couples shed "inhibitions and expand their repertoire of sexual behaviors."⁶⁷⁴

670. E. Pfeiffer, A. Verwoerd, H.S. Wang, "Sexual Behavior in Aged Men and Women," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 19 (1968):753-58.

671. William Masters and Virginia Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (Boston: Little Brown, 1966), 11-15, 223-270. The study of geriatric sexual response included sixty-one women ages forty-one to seventy-eight and two-hundred-and-twelve men ages fifty-one to ninety years old. The sample was weighted toward individuals with higher educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. There is no racial data for the geriatric study.

672. Shere Hite, *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study on Female Sexuality* (New York: Macmillan, 1976),

673. Mary Jo Pompeo, *Human Sexuality and Aging* (Center for Studies in Aging, North Texas State University, 1979), 39. In 1974 SIECUS adopted ten position statements, among them one on sexuality and aging which declared: "Aging people are too often deprived of opportunities for sexual companionship and expression, which they need despite unscientific beliefs to the contrary. Society has an obligation to create conditions conducive to the fulfillment of these needs." See: "Sexuality and Aging," *SIECUS Report*, July 1976, 1.

674. Mary Ann Sviland, "Helping Elderly Couples Attain Sexual Liberation and Growth," *SIECUS Report*,

Sexologists also offered forums in retirement communities across the country. A 1974 symposium on “Sex and the Mature Adult,” held in a tony Miami country club, drew 700 seniors. “Keep enjoying sex as long as you can,” Dr. Sallie Schumacher, former member of the Masters and Johnson team, told the audience. “Stop feeling ashamed and guilty because you think you are too old for it. Sexual activity can help keep you young; it's a normal function to be enjoyed at any age.”⁶⁷⁵

Many audience members had long been following Schumacher's advice. Flirtation and romance were key ingredients of social life in mid-century retirement villages. The dance floor at the Twenty-First Street Senior Center in Miami Beach swarmed with people most Saturday nights. The tango and the cha cha “act like medicine” explained seventy-three-year-old Samuel Maiman. “People who used to sit alone on porches or in little rooms come here and forget their worries.” The superintendent of city recreation noted that numerous romances and marriage proposals were made on the lively dance floor.⁶⁷⁶ This steamy side of retirement living was the subject of a 1973 *Time* magazine story on “Romance and the Aged.” “In Florida ... [and] across the nation, elderly people in growing numbers are having emotionally close, long-term affairs,” explained the reporter. “Like teenagers, old people date and dance. They send scorching glances at each other across the room. They talk about 'steadies' and the women grow possessive about boyfriends”⁶⁷⁷

Distrust and jealousy were much-discussed by-products of retirement community romance. Advice books and columns on retirement cautioned married women to keep a close

July 1976, 3-4.

675. “Frank Talk About Sex,” *Modern Maturity*, Feb/March 1974, 47-48.

676. Sandy Schneir, “Oldsters Find Zest in Life,” *Miami News*, Nov. 27, 1959.

677. E. Pfeiffer, “Romance and the Aged,” *Time*, June 4, 1973, 48.

eye on their mates. “Gals! Florida abounds with lonely widows and divorcees whose one aim in life appears to be putting an end to their loneliness” warned retirement writer, Selina Thomson. “Wives of retired men should be on the watch for the fluttery helplessness of the ...woman who breathlessly twitters her problems (and a strong whiff of Chanel No. 5) into the sympathetic ear of the guy you saw first – thirty-five years ago!”⁶⁷⁸ A 1970 *Golden Years* column on infidelity similarly suggested that “a wife might take a hard look at a divorcee in her late forties or fifties who starts hanging around her husband. She might be a little cautious about women who grow too attentive on travel tours or cruises.”⁶⁷⁹

Such stereotypes contained a grain of truth, as the opportunities for sex and romance were considerably greater for aging men than for older women. Duke University's 1960s study on sexuality and aging noted that ninety percent of female interviewees stopped having intercourse after their husbands became impotent or died, but marital status had “little or no effect on the incidence of sexual activity among elderly men.”⁶⁸⁰ Demographics and cultural double-standards account for this difference. Women outnumbered men during the retirement years, with the female majority increasing substantially in the seventh decade and beyond. Despite the rise of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, moreover, many Americans still deemed it inappropriate – even abhorrent - for older women to take the sexual initiative or to date younger men.⁶⁸¹

Here's to You, Mrs. Robinson: The Media's Portrayal of Older Women's Sexuality

678. Selina Thomson, *Birds on a Banana Tree: Or How Not to Retire and Move to Florida* (Hicksville, NJ: Exposition, 1978), 166.

679. Thomas Collins, “The Golden Years,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, May 21, 1970.

680. Norman Lobsenz, “Sex and the Senior Citizen,” *New York Times Magazine*, Jan 30, 1974.

681. Ibid.

The acclaimed 1967 motion picture *The Graduate* and the 1971 cult classic *Harold and Maude* provide insight into the popular portrayal of the older woman involved in a May/December affair.⁶⁸² The highest-grossing film of 1968, director Mike Nichols's *The Graduate* was nominated for seven Academy Awards. The movie explores the seduction of Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman), a confused and awkward twenty-year-old college graduate by Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft), a forty-something woman trapped in an unhappy marriage. Wildly popular among college students, the film tapped into a growing feeling of alienation among young people and sparked debate about a perceived generation gap that divided older suburban parents from their teenage and young-adult children. In a review for *Ladies Home Journal* the forty-eight-year-old newscaster David Brinkley described the movie as “pretty bad” and mused that young people seemed to enjoy it “because it said ... that we [older adults] are self-centered and materialistic, that we are licentious and deeply hypocritical about it, that we try to make them into walking advertisements of our own affluence, our own vanities draped around their necks like garlands of rancid marigolds.”⁶⁸³

A love-starved, fading beauty, Mrs. Robinson is the ultimate rancid marigold. A *Harper's* review described Robinson as a “malevolent ... caved-in alcoholic who is also a nymphomaniac” and Braddock as “her total victim.”⁶⁸⁴ The *Reporter* agreed, characterizing Robinson as a “sex-starved bitch.”⁶⁸⁵ The idea of a bitter older woman seducing a naïve young man was repugnant to many Americans. Posters showing Robinson and Braddock in bed together outraged travelers in the New York City subway system. Ensuing controversy

682. Other variations on this theme include the films *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *All Fall Down* (1962), and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1962).

683. David Brinkley, “What's Wrong with 'The Graduate,’” *Ladies Home Journal*, April 1968, 79.

684. Robert Kotlowitz, “Capote's Killers and Others,” *Harper's Magazine*, March 1968, 153-156.

685. Andrew Greeley, “Sons and Fathers,” *The Reporter*, Feb. 1968, 38-39.

forced the Transit Authority to remove the advertisement.⁶⁸⁶ It is worth noting that Bancroft, the actress who portrayed Robinson was only a few years older than Hoffman (who was thirty at the time he played the role of Braddock). Had Bancroft looked the part of a slightly sagging, wrinkled older woman, one can only imagine the disdain of film critics and the general public.

Harold and Maude, a film directed by Hal Ashby and based on a novel of the same name by Colin Higgins, drew just this sort of disgust and ridicule. The picture explores the blossoming romance between twenty-year-old Harold (Bud Cort) and eighty-year-old Maude (Ruth Gordon). Advertisements described the film as “a comedy of love that winks at the idea that sex is only for the young and beautiful.”⁶⁸⁷ When asked in an interview if she “had any qualms about ... bucking the taboo against cradle-snatching, especially as done by an old woman,” Gordon, who was married to a man sixteen years her junior responded, “I never have qualms about takin' a great part ... If somebody decrepit and fallin' down the stairs got married to an eighteen-year-old, I guess that wouldn't be appropriate. But you gotta show me the lady and you gotta show me the guy ... I'll be seventy-five and I think I'm *terribly* attractive. I don't know why I should change in five years. I'm gonna be a mighty big smash and a sexpot when I'm eighty.”⁶⁸⁸ Critics vehemently disagreed. “Mr. Cort's baby face and teen-age build look grotesque alongside Miss Gordon's tiny, weazened [sic] frame,” wrote one reviewer.⁶⁸⁹ “Can a boy of twenty find happiness with a woman of eighty? If the boy is a nut, and the lady has the romantic appeal of the late Ben Turbin?,” asked another. “Ruth

686. “'Graduate' Subway Ad Dropped After Protest,” *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1968.

687. *New York Times*, Sept 8, 1971.

688. Leticia Kentsan Francisco, “A Boy of 20 and a Woman of 80,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1971.

689. Vincent Canby, “Screen: 'Harold and Maude' and Life,” *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1971.

Gordon is playing Maude in the film. If the screenplay resembles the book, the audience will require more Tums than handkerchiefs.”⁶⁹⁰

Scientific evidence may have proved that older - even elderly - women were sexual beings, but popular culture had a hard time accepting that fact. This was especially true if the older woman looked her age. Gordon embraced her mature body with enthusiasm. “I’m just gonna be what I’m gonna be,” she reported. “And that’s nothin’ to do with the time, nothin’ to do with age, nothin’ to do with whether my hair is tinted or whether it’s gray, or whether I’ve got wrinkles or whether I’ve had a face lift.”⁶⁹¹ Such open acceptance of the aging process stood in stark contrast to the messages that filled magazine and television advertisements. Beautiful models assured maturing women that they *could* be sexy after forty or fifty or even sixty, but warned them they must *look* the part.⁶⁹² This meant purchasing hair dyes, eye creams, and diet pills to preserve a youthful face and figure.⁶⁹³ “When you reach a certain age (we’ll never tell you what it is, but you’ll know when the time comes), you need a very special kind of night cream,” cautioned one advertisement. “At that moment of truth, discover ... Olay Vitalizing Night Cream, a secret shared by fortunate women ... who

690. “Readers Report: Harold and Maude,” *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1971.

691. Francisco.

692. Articles and advertisements assured aging women that they could retain their good looks and sexual appeal, however, older women were not deemed attractive enough to fill magazine pages. A 1981 study published in *Journalism Quarterly* determined that magazine ads published between 1960 and 1979 employed increasingly younger female models. See: Paula England, Alice Kuhn, Teresa Gardner, “The Ages of Men and Women Portrayed in Magazine Advertisements, 1960-1970: A Double Standard of Ageism,” *Journalism Quarterly* 53:3 (Autumn 1981): 468-71.

693. Sample advertisements from 1973 issues of *Harper's Bazaar* include Clairol hair coloring ads which promised “You’re not getting older. You’re getting better!” (Feb), 27; a peeling treatment which supposedly left skin “amazingly fresh, flawless and youthful looking.” (Feb), 27; an ad for Formula 405 cosmetics which asked: “Did She Have a Face Lift? Or is she using Formula 405?” (April), 46; and Traynor Lift face creams to “smooth out unsightly wrinkles ... and firm up sagging skin...” (Aug), 24.

never ... show their true age.”⁶⁹⁴

Female sensuality might be ageless, but it remained intimately tied to youthful beauty. This mixed message prevented many older women from fully embracing their sexuality while increasing their time and attention to beauty regimens. In 1949 French philosopher Simon de Beauvoir described the “autumn and winter of life” as a time when a woman “is freed from social obligations, dieting, and the care of her beauty.”⁶⁹⁵ By 1977 one advice manual for aging women declared that although “it is still possible ... for a woman to refuse to use the technological means ... to stay young and 'sexy' looking, ... the ensuing advantages are not always clear.”⁶⁹⁶ Another noted that, “while there may be some nostalgic charm in the picture of Whistler's mother ... older women today hardly view this as the image of themselves.”⁶⁹⁷

Red-Hot Mama: Race, Class, and Mature Beauty

Popular perceptions about mature female beauty and sexuality also drew on socio-economic stereotypes. One health and beauty guide argued that well-educated, economically successful women tended “to be more experimental in their sexual practices ... [and] enjoy it more ... than women in lower social classes.”⁶⁹⁸ Another observed that older upper- and middle-class women were most likely to preserve their sexual appeal. After all, facial creams

694. Advertisement for Olay Vitalizing Night Cream, *Harper's Bazaar*, Oct 1973, 132.

695. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, New York: Penquin Books, 1983), 595. First published in French in 1949.

696. Constantina Safilios-Rothchild, “Sexuality, Power, and Freedom Among 'Older' Women,” in *Looking Ahead: A Woman's Guide to the Problems and Joys of Growing Older*, eds. Lillian E Troll, Joan Israel, and Kenneth Israel (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall., 1977), 164.

697. Estelle Fuchs, *The Second Season: Life, Love, and Sex* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1977), 51.

and salon appointments were expensive and time consuming.⁶⁹⁹ In a discussion of menopause de Beauvoir similarly concluded that laboring women had little time to worry about their femininity. Those who worked in factories and farms likely overlooked gray hair and “greeted the disappearance of the monthly burden with relief.”⁷⁰⁰

The assumption that laboring women had little time for vanity was reinforced by beauty product promotions featuring leisured women at play. The glamorous world depicted in fashion magazines seldom included white working-class women and almost never pictured black women.⁷⁰¹ Yet Kathy Peiss has demonstrated that concerns about aging and personal appearance were not limited by class or race. Older women applied cosmetics “as a means of veiling the real and deeply felt effects of time and labor,” she notes. One woman in Peiss’s account used cosmetics because, “It’s hard to get up at six, work till five or six, rush home, eat, and either step out or do some odd jobs around home, and still have rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes.” Black agricultural and domestic workers also purchased beauty products. Peiss notes that these women spent “substantial sums for hair growers and glossine.”⁷⁰²

While race, age, and class rendered older, hard-working, black women invisible to the mass-market beauty business, demeaning caricatures of these same women appealed to

698. Margaret Hellie Huyck, “Sex and the Older Woman,” in *Looking Ahead: A Woman’s Guide to the Problems and Joys of Growing Older*, 45.

699. Safilios-Rothchild, 164.

700. Simone de Beauvoir, 587.

701. Mid-century ad agencies rarely employed black models. By the mid-1960s the beauty business responded to growing demands among African Americans for equal representation by employing increasing numbers of black models. In 1964 and 1974 the first black models graced the covers of *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue* respectively. Despite these advances, black models remained underrepresented and underpaid throughout the late-twentieth century. Peiss, 257-258; 262-264; “Have Black Models Really Made It?,” *Ebony*, May 1970, 152-54, 156, 158, 160; Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1994), 54-55.

702. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (NY: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 184-185, 230, 256.

nineteenth- and twentieth-century marketers who hawked household products. It is telling that one of the era's iconic representations of black women adorned pancake boxes rather than bottles of luxuriant moisturizing creams. In 1890 the Pearl Milling company created the Aunt Jemima character to promote its pancake flour. In 1926 the Quaker Oats company purchased the trademark and Aunt Jemima became a familiar face in kitchens across America. The trademark drew on a long tradition of product promotions which used racial and sexual stereotypes to romanticize the Old South and slavery. An older, dark-skinned woman with a bulging body and wide grin, Aunt Jemima epitomized the mythical, warm-hearted mammy. Dressed in a long skirt and apron, head wrapped in a bandanna, the icon reinforced white Americans' association of older black women with domestic service. With her big arms and shoulders, this hearty old maid stood ever ready to serve a piping-hot breakfast.⁷⁰³

For centuries Anglo-American culture had stigmatized older black women as ugly, asexual servants, while younger black women were deemed dirty and lascivious.⁷⁰⁴ Of course, African American women saw a very different image of themselves reflected in beauty parlor mirrors. They took pride in their appearance; and, as increasing numbers of black women entered clerical and sales positions in the post-war years they depended on careful grooming to signify middle-class respectability and equality with white women. They

703. The civil rights movement eradicated many racist marketing campaigns, but images of black servitude endured. In response growing protest, the Quaker Oats company modernized Aunt Jemima in 1968. The (in)famous icon now appeared more slender and donned a headband rather than a bandanna. Despite her changing appearance, however, Aunt Jemima has remained a powerful and painful reminder of this country's exploitation of black women. M.M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 169-183; Peiss, 235; Kern-Foxworth, xxi, xviii-xix, 29-41, 61-108, 168-183; Jo-Ann Morgan, "Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New-Century," *American Art* 9:1 (Spring 1995): 106.

704. Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1985), 29-30, 46, 60, 164-165; Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities* (NY: Ballantine Books, 2003), 200.

used hair conditioners, skin creams, and cosmetics to repaint popular perceptions of African American womanhood.⁷⁰⁵

While a number of studies explore black beauty culture, few consider aging and its impact on African American perceptions of feminine sexuality. An examination of the advertisements and articles published in *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence* magazines during the 1960s and early 1970s provides some preliminary observations. Although these African-American publications featured young adult models almost exclusively, they appear less obsessed with the postponement of aging than most mass-circulation magazines aimed primarily at white women.⁷⁰⁶ Advertisements for beauty aids abound, but promotions for hair conditioners and relaxers, skin brighteners, and complexion creams predominate. Advertisements for girdles, wrinkle creams, and hair dyes are far less numerous. Similarly, while *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* regularly featured stories about trimming the middle-aged waistline or keeping wrinkles at bay, such articles were largely absent from the African American publications.

A keen class consciousness offers one explanation for these differences. Increasing numbers of African Americans achieved middle class status in the post-war era. Many were anxious to look and act the part, which had more to do with proper hairstyles and attire than with the desperate search for endless youth.⁷⁰⁷ Mother nature provides an additional reason.

African American women may have been less concerned about purchasing products to

705. Black beauty culture had long been in the business of racial pride and mobilization. Black-owned beauty businesses flourished throughout the early-to-mid twentieth century. While beauty parlors provided a warm and familiar space for grass-roots organization, the act of grooming itself was connected with racial advancement. Peiss, 89-96; Haidarali, 11-12, 30-32; Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ Press, 2003), 144-157.

706. Though popular with women readers, *Ebony* (first published in 1945) and *Jet* (first published in 1951) were not women's magazines. *Essence* was one of the first widely-circulated African American women's magazines. It was first published in 1970.

707. Haidarali, 12-13, 17.

hydrate the skin and smooth wrinkles simply because their mirrors reflected fewer visible signs of aging. When black women “gaze at their more rapidly aging white sisters, they can be thankful that their pigmented epidermis is less prone to becoming wrinkled,” observed *Ebony* magazine.⁷⁰⁸

The veneration of older women within the black community also shaped African American attitudes about aging. Louis Banner has highlighted African American literary and musical traditions which celebrate older women's wisdom and sexuality. She cites blues singers of the 1920s and 1930s as one particularly potent example. Older female artists such as “Red-hot Mama” Rainey wooed audiences with their voluptuous bodies, strong voices, and sexual lyrics. Rainey, moreover, frequently “used the theme of relationships with younger men to assert authority.” While white audiences reviled Mrs. Robinson for such behavior, Ma Rainey was a celebrated “high priestess” of the black community.⁷⁰⁹ In 1973 the sixty-seven-year-old star Josephine Baker turned heads and melted hearts. A *Jet* magazine review of Baker's Carnegie Hall performance described the multi-talented singer, dancer, and comedian as “*the Black Venus of our times.*” The article detailed Baker's “peek-a-boo, body-fitting” costumes as well as her intoxicating charm which made it “seem like she is trying to make love to you, all over your body, with her voice.”⁷¹⁰

Still the sexual revolution was not the province of white Americans alone. Articles on the subject appeared in black periodicals throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. *Jet* magazine's tribute to Baker was but one of many stories that focused special attention on

708. Kermit Mehlinger, “The Sexual Revolution,” *Ebony*, Aug 1966, 59.

709. Banner, 337-352.

710. “Josephine Baker: Sixty-Seven and Still on the Top,” *Jet*, July 5, 1973, 57.

changing attitudes about mature sexuality. *Jet* and *Ebony* noted the rise in marriage and romance among the elderly and quoted scientific studies disproving the myth that older people lost sexual interest and ability.⁷¹¹ “From teen-agers to grandmas, women have been affected by the sexual revolution,” reported a 1966 article in *Ebony* magazine. The story went on to highlight black women's “growing awareness of their own intricate feminine biology” including ovulation, menstruation, and menopause. “The long-standing myth that menopause means the end of an active, enjoyable sexual life has been dispelled,” the article asserted; “Colored women in their fifties and sixties are no longer acting as if their sex life is obsolete ... Many of these women who have had an impoverished sexual life before reaching their menopausal years, have found out what they interpreted as 'hot flushes' were instead feelings of passion from their long-suppressed sexual feelings. Some are able for the first time in their lives to be receptive towards their husbands and enjoy sex.”⁷¹²

Feminine Forever: Mature Sexuality and the “Change of Life”

By mid-century doctors, scientists, and the popular press were focusing increasing attention on mature women's physiology, and the advent of hormone replacement therapy in the late 1940s and 1950s was heralded as nothing less than a “new kind of sexual revolution.”⁷¹³ New York gynecologist Robert Wilson offered a gloomy and widely

711. See for example: Mehlinger, 57-62; “Senior Citizens Don't Lose Interest in Sex at Age 65,” *Jet*, Oct 11, 1973, 40; “Oldest Black Bicyclist Says 'Plenty Sex' is his Secret,” *Jet*, Oct 18, 1973, 46; “Moms Mabley Raps About Old Women, Young Love,” *Jet*, Jan 3, 1974, 61; “Young More Hung Up Than Old About Sex for Aged,” *Jet*, Jan 10, 1974, 20; “Professor Says Men Never Grow Too Old for Sex,” *Jet*, Feb 14, 1974, 17; “Many Old Folks Still Swing – Mentally and Physically,” *Jet*, Sept 26, 1974, 28; “Sex By Elderly Termed Deterrent to Suicide,” *Jet*, Oct 17, 1974, 52; “We Just Got Married,” *Jet*, Oct 31, 1974, 58; “Lovers, Ages 84 and 82, Give Up Money to Wed,” *Jet*, Aug 8, 1974, 30.

712. Mehlinger, 59.

713. Robert Wilson, *Feminine Forever* (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1966), 15.

publicized prognosis of menopause as a “deficiency disease.” Untreated, the menopausal woman endured “a castration” that “suddenly desexed” her. As her once amble supply of estrogen slipped away, she lost sex drive and femininity. Her skin wrinkled, her breasts sagged, and her frame withered. She became “the equivalent of a eunuch.”⁷¹⁴ One of the pioneers of estrogen treatment, Wilson promoted hormonal therapy as a fountain-of youth remedy. “When you find a woman of fifty looking like thirty, or a woman of sixty looking – and acting – like forty, chances are that she is one of the lucky ones who have benefited from the new techniques of menopause prevention,” explained Wilson in his 1966 best seller, *Feminine Forever*.⁷¹⁵ “The outward signs of this age-defying youthfulness are a straight-backed posture, supple breast[s] ... smooth skin ... firm muscle tone, and that particular vigor and grace typical of a healthy female. At fifty, such women still look attractive in tennis shorts or sleeveless dresses.”⁷¹⁶

Articles and advertisements supporting Wilson's manifesto peppered publications ranging from *Look* and *Vogue* magazines to *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, and the *New Republic*.⁷¹⁷ *Feminine Forever* and a spate of other popular books on the benefits of hormone replacement promised that the “change of life” no longer spelled a death sentence for women's sexual appetite and appeal.⁷¹⁸ Estrogen pills would not only ease the symptoms

714. Wilson, 40, 96-97.

715. More than 140,000 copies of *Feminine Forever* were sold in the first year of publication. The book remained in print through the year 2000.

716. Robert Wilson, 16.

717. R.A. Wilson, “Which Hormone to Take and When,” *Vogue*, June 1966), 92-95; R.A. Wilson, “Key to Staying Young,” *Look*, Jan. 11, 1966, 66; “Feminine Forever,” *Newsweek*, April 3, 1967, 55; “Now, No Matter What Your Age, You Can Be Feminine Forever,” *New York Times*, Jan 16, 1966; Sommers, “Can a Woman be Feminine Forever?,” *The New Republic*, March 19, 1966, 15-16.

718. See for example, David Reuben, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex but Were Afraid to*

associated with menopause - such as hot flashes, mood swings, and sleeplessness - the therapy, in the words of one *Harper's Bazaar* article, would “keep you flirtatiously feminine for the rest of your days – and nights.”⁷¹⁹

Although it was soon apparent that hormonal treatments would not lift the breast or smooth the brow, sales of estrogen soared throughout the mid-to-late 1900s. By 1975 American doctors were writing twenty million prescriptions a year for estrogen-replacement therapy.⁷²⁰ Today - especially in light of cancer scares tied to hormonal therapy - it seems easy to conclude that patients were hoodwinked by Dr. Wilson's alarmist language, by pharmaceutical companies' aggressive advertising campaigns, and by personal vanity. Feminist objections to hormone replacement therapy appear to confirm this belief.⁷²¹ Beginning in the late 1970s many feminists described estrogen therapy as the unnecessary medicalization of a natural process. “The advocates of routine hormone replacement therapy for a whole generation of women were arguing that ... the most dreadful things would happen to all women if they didn't get estrogen,” fumed women's health journalist, Estelle Fuchs. “It's as if women cannot win – they're considered emotionally unstable and unreliable when

Ask (New York: D. McKay Co, 1969), 292. Like Wilson, Reuben argued: “As the estrogen is shut off, a woman comes as close as she can to becoming man, increased facial hair, deepened voice, obesity, and the decline of the breasts and genitalia all contribute to a masculine appearance. Coarsened features, enlargement of the clitoris, a gradual baldness complete the tragic picture. Not really a man but no longer a woman, these individuals live in the world of intersex.” Only estrogen therapy, Reuben explained, would save aging women from this fate.

719. “Sex Begins at Forty,” *Harper's Bazaar*, August 1973, 87.

720. Jane E. Brody, “Menopausal Estrogens: Benefits and Risks of the 'Feminine' Drug,” *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1979.

721. For example: Paul Komesaroff, Philipa Rothfield, and Jeanne Daly, eds., *Reinterpreting Menopause: Cultural and Philosophical Issues* (NY: Routledge, 1977); Frances B. McCrea, “The Politics of Menopause: The 'Discovery' of a Deficiency Disease,” *Social Problems* 31 (1983): 11-23; Susan Bell, “Changing Ideas: The Medicalization of Menopause,” 24:6 *Social Science and Medicine* (June 1987), 535–542; Bettina Leysen, “Medicalization of the Menopause: From 'Feminine Forever' to 'Healthy Forever'” in *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace* Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, eds (New York: Zed Books, 1996), 173-191.

they menstruate, and they're considered emotionally unstable and unreliable when they stop!"⁷²² Members of the Older Women's Liberation league echoed these concerns. In a 1972 consciousness raising conference they advocated yoga, vitamins, and biofeedback therapy as alternative means for staying healthy and sexy after menopause.⁷²³

Historian Judith Houck's recent examination of menopause complicates this "he said, she said" view of hormonal replacement therapy.⁷²⁴ Despite Wilson's sexist rhetoric, Houck argues, estrogen treatment evolved in response to women's demands that their health concerns be taken seriously. "Far from rejecting Wilson and his ideas," explains Houck, many feminists championed his efforts. Houck cites the work of research-scientist Belle Canon who applauded Wilson for providing the "first and only stimulus to public and medical discussion of menopause" and journalist Wendy Cooper who embraced hormone replacement therapy because it allowed women "to control the biology that had for so long controlled them."⁷²⁵

Nevertheless, by the mid-1970s, the tide was turning in favor of critics of estrogen therapy and of the medical profession's patronizing attitude toward women. In an article for *Prime Time*, Barbara Seaman (future founder of the National Women's Health Network) urged women to "gain autonomy" over their minds and bodies and to reject "doctors who push us around."⁷²⁶ Reports linking estrogen therapy to uterine cancer encouraged this

722. Fuchs, 161.

723. Judy Klemesrud, "Older Women – Their Own Cry for Liberation," *New York Times*, June 6, 1972.

724. Judith A. Houck, "'What Do These Women Want?': Feminist Responses to Feminine Forever, 1963-1980," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 77:1 (Spring 2003):103-132.

725. Houck, 110.

726. Barbara Seaman, "Examine Your Doctor Thoroughly – for Symptoms of Male Chauvinism and a Propensity for Performing Unnecessary Surgery," *Prime Time*, Nov 1972, 2.

perspective.⁷²⁷ Still, feminists “were not of one mind about menopause and menopausal treatment,” explains Houck. All sides agreed, however, that women should be empowered to learn the facts about menopause, assess their own health needs, and make the decision about estrogen therapy for themselves.⁷²⁸

Most feminists also agreed that older women could be sexy with or without hormonal treatment. “We really have it all over men at this age,” beamed one post-menopausal Older Women's League member at a “Speak Out for Change” gathering. “We can speed up our libido with testosterone and we don't have to worry about getting pregnant.”⁷²⁹ A league-sponsored divorce seminar challenged the idea that older single women could never attract romantic attention. “Fascinating things happen when you go out without an escort,” announced one fifty-eight-year-old participant who recounted the pleasures of single status, “I danced with sixty men for nine and three-quarters hours.”⁷³⁰

“Old Queens” and Strong Survivors: Alternative Lifestyles Among Older Adults

Older Women's League members also challenged conventional thinking about mature sexual relationships. In an “Alternative Life Styles” workshop participants acknowledged the loneliness that many older single women endured. They concluded that “a good man is hard to find” but suggested that fulfilling personal and sexual relationships need not depend on finding one perfect prince charming. The workshop explored the possibilities of group sex,

727. Houck, 116-117; Jane Brody, “Menopausal Estrogens;” Jane Brody, “Physicians' Views Unchanged On Use of Estrogen Therapy,” *New York Times*, Dec. 5, 1975.

728. Houck, 108-109, 131-2.

729. Klemestrud, 34.

730. Ibid., 34.

lesbianism, and masturbation as alternatives to monogamous heterosexual relationships.⁷³¹

League members were not alone in suggesting alternative options for the growing numbers of single, senior women. Maggie Kuhn lobbied for the acknowledgment and encouragement of “close love relationships” among older, single women.⁷³² Sociologist Ruth Shonle Cavan agreed. “The excess of old women cannot be absorbed through monogamous marriage,” she noted in a 1976 publication by the Scripps Foundation Gerontology Center. Cavan encouraged the adoption of creative relationships through communal living, mate-sharing, and female companionships.⁷³³ She conceded, however, that public disapproval would hamper the acceptance of such innovations “by more than a small number” of elderly. Older women might feel uncomfortable forming close female relationships and fear accusations of lesbianism.⁷³⁴

Such concerns were justified. Older gays and lesbians endured discrimination both as homosexuals and as aging Americans. Popular stereotypes depicted elderly lesbians and homosexuals as lonely and miserable. Their rejection of heterosexuality supposedly meant that they had no children or grandchildren⁷³⁵ and that they remained isolated from the church and other family-centered institutions.⁷³⁶ The older homosexual man was further stigmatized

731. Ibid., 34.

732. Margaret Kuhn, *Maggie Kuhn on Aging*, ed. Dieter Hessel (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 85-86.

733. Ruth Shonle Cavan, “Speculations on Innovations to Conventional Marriage in Old Age,” in *The Sociology of Aging: Selected Readings*, eds. Robert Atchley and Mildred Seltzer (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1976), 141-146.

734. Cavan, 143-145.

735. In fact, studies conducted in the 1970s revealed that roughly twenty-five to thirty-five percent of older lesbians had been married and that at least half of these women were mothers. See: Martha Kirkpatrick, “Middle Age and the Lesbian Experience,” *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 17 (Spring/Summer 1989), 87.

736. James D. Reid, “Development in Late Life: Older Lesbian and Gay Lives,” in *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities Over the Lifespan*, eds. Anthony R. D'Augelli and Charlotte J. Patterson (NY: Oxford Univ Press, 1995), 215, 217-18, 223; J.S. Francher and J. Henkin, “The Menopausal Queen: Adjustment to Aging and the

as a sexual pervert and child molester. “[According to stereotype], his sole...pursuit is the orgasm, a momentary physical satisfaction which relieves the tremendous emptiness of his life,” explained philosophy professor Joseph McCaffrey. “He persistently preys on the ... child or young man. He is sometimes spotted on the playground with candy, pornographic material, or perhaps drugs.”⁷³⁷

McCaffrey and members of the Gay Liberation Movement worked to counter such malicious stereotypes, but the homosexual community was not immune to self-fashioned ageism. The movement was directed by young people who frequently dismissed older gay men and lesbians. Gay activist Ralph Schaffer's 1972 account of being an older man in a youth-oriented movement reflects his frustration and anger at being overlooked: “It is about time that liberation come to grips with its youthism. It is the most vicious and entrenched of our fuck-ups left over from our oppression. It is tragic because it leaves half our gay people lonely, alienated, and unwanted.”⁷³⁸ Schaffer was so disillusioned by ageism that he decided to leave the movement. “In gay liberation I've known more gay people than in all my life. I have never been so lonely,” he reported.⁷³⁹

The ageism that Schaffer experienced was aggravated by changing inter-generational relationships. “Prior to 1969, older and younger gay men interacted in a 'mentor/protege' tradition, with older established and respected gay men introducing younger gay men to

Male Homosexual,” 43:4 *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (July 1973), 670-674.

737. Joseph McCaffrey, “Homosexuality: The Stereotype, the Real,” in *The Homosexual Dialectic*, ed. Joseph McCaffrey (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 138-139. See also: Jess Stearn, *The Sixth Man* (NY: Doubleday, 1961). The prize-winning journalist described the aging gay man as “regress(ing) to a point where he preys on small children,” 259.

738. Ralph S. Schaffer, “Will You Still Need Me When I'm 64?” in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, eds. Karla Jay and Allen Young (NY: Douglas Book Corp, 1972) 278-9.

739. Schaffer, 279.

social circles that remained closeted,” explains psychologist James Reid. “In the post-1969 organized gay community, radical and institution-building reformists rejected the ‘mentor/protege’ tradition as reflecting internalized homophobia by supporting remaining in the closet. Younger, gay liberationists then formed their own social, political, and economic organizations, which tended to ignore older gay men and deny them positions of leadership.”⁷⁴⁰

The gay subculture's emphasis on youthful beauty placed aging homosexuals at a further disadvantage.⁷⁴¹ “The gay world is centered around beauty and pretty things and wrinkles aren't pretty,” explained one interviewee in James Kelly's 1974 doctoral survey of attitudes about aging within Los Angeles' homosexual community. Informants noted that homosexuals judged “physical appearance first,” and that older gays were lonely because “nobody goes to bed with them.”⁷⁴² Stereotypes within the homosexual community held that gay men took “themselves out of circulation” and simply “fade[d] away” as they aged. Labeled “old queens,” these men were deemed effeminate and unattractive. They avoided bars and other forms of gay social life as they retreated back into the “closet.”⁷⁴³

By the mid-1970s a small number of studies began to challenge these assumptions,

740. Reid, “Development in Late Life: Older Lesbian and Gay Lives,” 228-9. For more on the generational bias of the Gay Liberation Movement see: J. Grube, “Natives and Settlers: An Ethnographic Note on Early Interactions of Older Homosexual Men with Younger Gay Liberationists,” in *Gay Midlife and Maturity*, ed. J.A. Lee (NY: Haworth, 1991), 119-135.

741. Reid, 228. See also: M.S. Weinberg and C.J. Williams, *Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations* (NY: Oxford Univ Press, 1974); James Kelly, “The Aging Male Homosexual: Myths and Reality,” *The Gerontologist* (Aug 1977), 328-332; M. R. Laner, “Growing Older Male: Heterosexual and Homosexual,” *Gerontologist* (Oct 1978), 496-501.

742. James J. Kelly, “Brothers and Brothers: The Gay Man's Adaptation to Aging,” (dissertation, Brandeis University, 1974), 145, 154.

743. Kelly, “Brothers and Brothers,” 91-92.

Kelly's work among them.⁷⁴⁴ While Kelly's younger interviewees worried about the isolation and loneliness of old age, older respondents offered a more positive perspective on aging. They did not consider themselves unattractive, effeminate, social outcasts. They maintained gay friendships and continued to enjoy sex.⁷⁴⁵ "I would say that I have as much sex as I had then, maybe more than I had when I was in my twenties," commented one interviewee.⁷⁴⁶ "I found a great deal of your sexuality depends on your diet. And your exercise. And your attitude toward sex," explained another respondent.⁷⁴⁷ One interviewee noted the benefits of mature homosexual relationships: "An awful lot of [younger] fellows want someone to do them and the hell with you. They don't even bother to take you out to dinner, or anything like that. You get an older man ... and the attitude is entirely different. They want companionship and understanding."⁷⁴⁸

The small numbers of studies conducted on lesbianism in the later years established similar findings.⁷⁴⁹ These women were not the isolated, miserable old crones of popular stereotype. A 1979 ethnography on the lives of twenty older lesbians (aged fifty to seventy-three) revealed socially and sexually active women whose attitudes toward aging ranged the

744. See for example: Fred Minnigerode and Marcy Adelman, "Elderly Homosexual Women and Men: Report on a Pilot Study," *The Family Coordinator* (Oct, 1978), 451-456; J.S. Francher and J. Henkin, "The Menopausal Queen: Adjustments to Aging and the Male Homosexual," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 43(4), 670-674; R.A. Friend, "Gay Aging: Adjustment and the Older Gay Male," *Alternative Lifestyles* 3 (1980): 231-248; R.M. Berger, *Gay and Gray: The Older Homosexual Man* (Champaign: Univ of IL Press, 1982).

745. Kelly, "Brothers and Brothers," 115, 120.

746. *Ibid.*, 111.

747. *Ibid.*, 111.

748. *Ibid.*, 115.

749. See for example: Minnigerode and Adelman, 453-456; Mina Meyer, "The Older Lesbian," (master's thesis, CA State University, 1979); Chris Almvig, *The Invisible Minority: Aging and Lesbianism* (Syracuse: Utica College of Syracuse, 1982); Monika Kehoe, "Lesbians Over 65: A Triply Invisible Minority," 12:3/4 *Journal of Homosexuality* (1986): 139-152.

gamut from acceptance of the changes brought on by aging to common fears about illness and death.⁷⁵⁰ The fifty older, white, middle-class lesbians surveyed by Monika Kehoe in 1986 reported that they appreciated the emotional intimacy that female relationships afforded. While the majority of respondents preferred living with partners, those living alone did not feel isolated. They were happy, healthy, and able to cope with aging.⁷⁵¹ These findings led Kehoe to conclude that older lesbians were “survivors” who were “equipped to make a better adjustment to aging than their heterosexual counterparts.”⁷⁵²

Finding Mr. Right: Sex, Romance, and Remarriage after Fifty

Single, heterosexual, aging women, meanwhile, did not fare as well - at least according to popular accounts. Their emotional and financial well-being remained pinned on finding Mr. Right. Overcoming obstacles to marriage was the frequent fodder of books and magazine articles written for older women. “How to Get A Husband After Fifty,” which appeared in a 1971 issue of *Modern Maturity*, offers a typical example. “After fifty, a woman must find proper ways of meeting an attractive man,” the author explained. “Husband-hunting is much like going on safari. First you choose the place to hunt.” The author described dinner parties, concerts, and hobby shows as particularly promising places to attract a mate. She advised readers to take care of personal appearance and noted that trim figures were most eye-catching, suggesting Joan Crawford and Ginger Rodgers as role models. Yet even plain, pudgy women had reason for hope because “a lot of men over fifty

750. Meyer.

751. Kehoe, 139-152.

752. Kehoe, 139, 148. See also: Kirkpatrick, “Middle Age and the Lesbian Experience,” 87-96; S. Raphael and M. Robinson, “The Older Lesbian: Love Relationships and Friendship Patterns,” in Trudy Darty and Sandee Potter, eds., *Women Identified Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1984), 67-82.

marry for companionship.”⁷⁵³

Despite such trite, sexist advice, many heterosexual single women did find love in their later years. Between 1960 and 1973, the number of brides ages sixty-four and over doubled to 16,000 -- the number of older grooms to 33,000. The article also correctly indicated that most senior marriages blossomed out of a desire for companionship rather than heated passion. In a 1978 Boston University study of recently married couples between the ages of sixty and eighty-four, men described loneliness as the main reason for wedding. A desire for care and assistance, followed closely behind. Women mentioned companionship as well, but stressed emotional attachment and their mates' personal qualities as deciding factors.⁷⁵⁴

The prospect of physical pleasure was not overlooked by silver-haired brides and grooms, however. “I don't know if I'm oversexed,” announced one recently remarried seventy-three-year-old man, “but I'm a lover. I like to pet, kiss, and hug.”⁷⁵⁵ Older newlyweds responded enthusiastically to nation-wide sexual surveys and indicated that intimacy was still an important part of marriage. Their sexual unions were particularly satisfying due to accumulated experience and to the fact that retirement and an empty nest left more time for love making. “In earlier marriage family responsibilities interfere with pleasurable sex,” wrote one seventy-four-year-old woman. “In later marriage attention can be given to pleasuring your partner.”⁷⁵⁶ Another respondent reported increased sexual freedom within

753. Amy Pritchard, “How to Get a Husband After 50,” *Modern Maturity*, June/July 1971, 67-68. See also: Tracy Elliot Hyde, *The Single Grandmother* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company, 1974).

754. Barbara Vinick, “Remarriage in Old Age,” *The Family Coordinator* 27:4 (Oct 1978): 359, 361.

755. Vinick, 362.

756. Bernard Starr and Marcella Bakur Weiner, *Sex and Sexuality in the Mature Years* (Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein and Day, 1981), 44-45.

marriage now that she no longer worried about unwanted pregnancy.⁷⁵⁷

Of course, not all devoted older lovers were married. While media reports focused on the “sexual indiscretions” of young Americans, surprising numbers of mature couples were living together outside of marriage. Ruth Schonle Cavan's descriptions of group-marriages and communal living appealed to very few older adults, but co-habitation among senior couples was on the rise. By the mid-1970s 18,000 couples over the age of sixty-five described themselves as “living together” according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The social stigma attached to unwed unions meant that many more remained unreported.⁷⁵⁸ Older heterosexual couples who decided not to wed did so for a variety of reasons, including basic economics. Prior to 1965, a widow who remarried lost all Social Security, veteran's, and civil service pensions earned by her deceased husband. In the late 1960s and 1970s the rules were amended but often they still penalized a widow with a reduction in benefits if she remarried. Private pension plans and wills frequently included similar penalties.⁷⁵⁹

Social and familial disapproval also prevented older heterosexual couples from marrying and forced many to live together in secret. “When my daughter comes down...for a visit, Bert moves out,” admitted one Miami Beach resident. “I don't want my daughter to

757. Starr and Weiner, 44-45.

758. Lobsenz, 8-9. Homosexual unions remained concealed from census takers for obvious reasons. Social and legal discrimination forced homosexual men and women to keep their love lives a secret from all but trusted confidants. See: Reid, “Development in Late Life: Older Lesbian and Gay Lives,” 215, 223; Kelly, “Brothers and Brothers,” 73, 91-92.

759. In 1965 the Social Security Act was amended to allow widows who remarried after age sixty to retain fifty percent of their deceased spouse's benefits. Widows who did not remarry were entitled to 82.5 percent of their deceased husband's social security benefits. In January 1979 the Social Security rules were amended to provide widows with full benefits upon remarriage. See: Letter to Congressman Claude Pepper from the Education and Public Welfare Division of the Library of Congress, Dec 19, 1965. Claude Pepper Library, Series 309A, Box 45, Folder 2; *Congressional Record* (Feb 11, 1965), 2552; *Congressional Record* (April 9, 1965), 7466; “Thousands of Aged 'Living in Sin' Fear Benefit Loss if They Marry,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 1965; Bob Wyrick, “Pepper Widens Remarry Bills,” *Miami News*, Jan 28, 1965; Rose Allegato, “Aid for Sinning Elders Given 60-40 Chance,” *Miami Herald*, June 8, 1965; Paul Wayne Snyder, *The Effect of New Marriages Among the Aged Upon the Disengagement Process* (dissertation, University of Florida, 1971), 16-17; Barbara H. Vinick, “Remarriage in Old Age,” *Family Coordinator* (October 1978), 363; Lobsenz, 8-9; Pfeiffer, 48.

know. She wouldn't think it was right.”⁷⁶⁰ Stereotypes labeled love affairs among the elderly “silly” or “dirty.” Americans often frowned on or flatly refused to accept the idea of romance and remarriage among older friends and relations. Some children worried that a new spouse would drain a parent's savings account and walk away with the inheritance. Others believed that in taking a new partner, the widowed parent dishonored the memory of the deceased spouse. Many felt embarrassed by what they described as older parents' “undignified” shenanigans.⁷⁶¹ Some children equated a parent's romantic intentions with dementia. “I am seventy-eight and thinking of getting married,” explained one retiree to a local advice column. “My children and friends think that I am senile. This isn't true. I am just lonely and this woman and I are very compatible.”⁷⁶² In another extreme example, a psychiatrist described instances in which offspring requested the institutionalization of recently remarried elderly parents.⁷⁶³

Once institutionalized, individuals were generally doomed to a life of celibacy. Nursing homes often prohibited all forms of sexual behavior. Residents were traditionally divided by sex into separate sections of the building. By mid-century this separation of male and female residents was becoming less stringent, but as late as the 1970s, some facilities still placed married couples in separate bedrooms and monitored their time together. Even when nursing homes encouraged inter-mingling among male and female residents, privacy

760. “Togetherness Their Real Security,” newspaper clipping, Claude Pepper Collection, Series 309A, Box 45, Folder 2.

761. Lillian Genn, “Boom in Retirement Marriage,” *Modern Maturity*, Feb/March 1970, 12; James Peterson, “Marriage and Sex and the Older Man and Woman,” *Modern Maturity*, Dec/Jan 1971, 40; Gilbert, 273; Walter McKain, “A New Look at Older Marriages,” *Family Coordinator* (Jan 1972), 62-63; Also see Maggie Kuhn's discussion of family attitudes toward remarriage among the elderly: Kuhn, 83-85.

762. Revy Wikler, “Ask Revy,” *Miami Beach Reporter*, May 21, 1970.

763. Pfeiffer, 48; Lobsenz, 8.

was almost always non-existent. This lack of privacy probably hampered homosexual relationships as well.⁷⁶⁴

The subject of sexuality “is sort of taboo” a spokeswoman of the American Nursing Home Association admitted in a 1974 *New York Times* interview. “It isn't ... [something] we concentrate on.” At the time of the interview the fourteen-year-old association had never addressed the topic of sexuality at any of its meetings.⁷⁶⁵ The shelving of such an important issue led to ignorance and intolerance of patients' needs and desires. Nurses responded to instances of patients' masturbation or coupling with disgust, punishment, and ridicule.⁷⁶⁶ Even a resident's basic sexual identity as a man or a woman was summarily dismissed. “I remember visiting a home where a woman had an asthma attack. The doctor came in and drew her robe aside so he could get at her chest,” recalled sociologist Carl Broderick. “She was in a convulsion of coughing; despite that, with one trembling hand she reached down and pulled her robe over her genitals. To me that was very human; she was saying, 'I am still a woman.' She wanted privacy, modesty. She was saying, 'I am not just a symptom for the doctor.’”⁷⁶⁷

Broderick was among a growing number of academics and practitioners in the mid-1970s and 1980s to address patient sexuality inside institutional settings. These gerontologists developed fledgling classes and training sessions on aging and sexuality to

764. Lobsenz, 30; Pompeo, 272.

765. Lobenz, 30, 32.

766. Mary Ellen Wilczewski, “Development of a Teaching Program for Nursing Home Staff: Sexuality and the Aged” (master's thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1980), 3-4.

767. Carlfred Broderick, “Sexuality and Aging: An Overview,” in *Sexuality and Aging*, ed. Irene Mortenson Burnside (LA: University of Southern CA Press, 1975), 4-5.

help nurses, doctors, and administrators improve patient care.⁷⁶⁸ “Elderly people in nursing homes *do* have sexual thoughts and feelings,” concluded social workers Mona Wasow and Martin Loeb in a 1974 Western Gerontological Society workshop on sexuality. “Traditionally we have viewed [patient sexuality] as something that ... should be eliminated.... [Today we are learning] to allow this pleasure to be available throughout the life span without shame and denial.”⁷⁶⁹

Something's Got to Give: The Legacy of the Sexual Revolution, Senior Style

A similar taboo has suppressed our historical understanding of sexuality throughout the life course. Historians have largely overlooked the dynamic social and cultural aspects of later life, for which sex and romance played an important role. When we examine the sexual revolution – and sexuality more broadly - older adults deserve a closer look. Haight Ashbury provoked much of the contemporary outrage, but it should not claim all of the historical glory. As this review of gerontological, sexual, and popular literature reveals, older Americans experienced important changes in their intimate relationships during the latter half of the twentieth century. Mature men and women spoke more freely and sought more information about sex than ever before. Retired couples reinvigorated their love lives after children left home. Unprecedented numbers of singles over sixty sought new mates and engaged in romantic affairs – relationships that added spice and intrigue to America's burgeoning retirement communities. Even institutional settings slowly adjusted to these new behaviors and attitudes. As nursing home staff and administrators learned more about sexuality and aging, they encouraged intermingling among male and female residents and

768. Shirley Good Kerwin, “Attitude Change in Baccalaureate Student Nurses Toward Sexuality in the Aging (master's thesis, Graduate School of the Texas Woman's University, 1976), 15; Wilczewski, 53.

769. Mona Wasow and Martin Loeb, “Sexuality in Nursing Homes,” in *Sexuality and Aging*, ed. Irene Burnside, 41.

provided increased personal privacy.

Today, nearly forty years after the Beatles first recorded “When I’m Sixty-Four,” the lyrics ring truer than ever before: “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, When I’m sixty-four?” The answer appears to a resounding, Yes! As the first of the baby boomers turn sixty, images and discussions about mature sexuality abound. Retired politicians speak frankly about overcoming erectile dysfunction and major league baseball players hawk Viagra on prime time television. Diane Keaton and Jack Nicolson reinvented the mature love scene in the 2003 romantic comedy *Something’s Gotta Give*, and a spate of books on sex in the later years promise that big screen passion is also possible for ordinary older men and women.⁷⁷⁰

Commentators are quick to describe the flaunting of mature sexuality as a “sea change from a generation ago.”⁷⁷¹ “Half a century ago, there were certainly exceptional fifty-year-old women who had lovers, and married people in their sixties and seventies who still enjoyed each other sexually. But it wasn’t the norm,” writes Gail Sheehy, who says that her book, *Sex and the Seasoned Woman* is “about a new universe of lusty, liberated women, some married and some not, who are unwilling to settle for the stereotypical roles of middle age.”⁷⁷² Yet, this chapter has demonstrated that the present day fascination with love and lust in the later years is better understood as part of an ongoing evolution in the history of mature sexuality. While aging baby boomers are certainly pushing boundaries, their parents and

770. Nancy Meyers, *Something’s Gotta Give* (Columbia Picture, 2003); Gail Sheehy, *Sex and the Seasoned Woman* (New York: Random House, 2006); Joan Price, *Better Than I Ever Expected: Straight Talk About Sex After Sixty* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006); Katherine Chaddock and Emilie Chaddock, *Flings, Frolics and Forever Afters: A Single Woman’s Guide to Romance After Fifty* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2005); Jane Juska, *A Round-Heeled Woman: My Late Life Adventures in Sex and Romance* (New York: Villard Books, 2003).

771. “Sex and Love: The New World,” *Newsweek*.

772. Sheehy, *Sex and the Seasoned Woman*, 11.

grandparents paved the way during the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.



Illustration 26: Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate*, 1967⁷⁷³

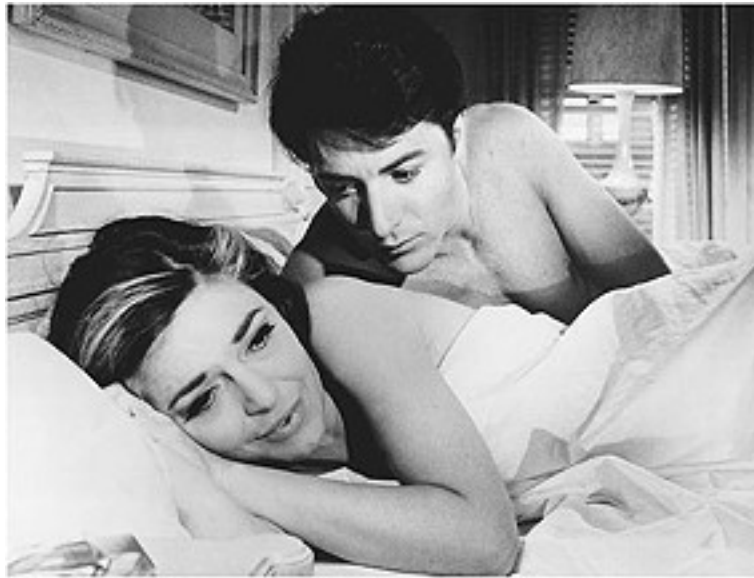


Illustration 27: Dustin Hoffman and Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate*, 1967⁷⁷⁴

773. Encyclopedia Britannica Online, www.britannica.com/eb/art-93095/Dustin-Hoffman-in-The-Graduate.

774. Internet Movie Database, www.imdb.com/gallery/mptv/1401/Mptv/1401/3461_0354.jpg.html?path=gallery&path_key=0061722.



Illustration 28: *Harold and Maude*, DVD cover⁷⁷⁵



Illustration 29: *New York Times* ad for Colin Higgins's novel *Harold and Maude*, 1971⁷⁷⁶

775. www.civicmediacenter.org/2005/04/

776. *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1971.



Josephine Baker: Sexty-Seven And Still On The Top

Illustration 30: Josephine Baker in a 1973 *Jet* magazine review⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁷. "Josephine Baker: Sexty-Seven and Still on the Top."



Illustration 31: Love and romance blossomed among older post-war Americans, but popular opinion often deemed the expression of senior sexually taboo⁷⁷⁸

778. Bulbul and Irene Paull, *Everybody is Studying Us* (San Francisco, CA: Glide Publications and the California Public Association for Older Americans, 1976), 33.

CHAPTER SIX

BUBBES ON THE BEACH: JUDAISM, GENDER, AND THE RETIREMENT FRONTIER

“He who learns from the young, eats unripe grapes and drinks new wine;
he who learns from the old eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.”

-The Talmud

“If no one speaks Yiddish, I don't know how I'll manage.
Somehow, no matter how bad things are, when I hear Yiddish,
something in me goes free, and everything changes around.”

-Basha, contemplating her move to a nursing home⁷⁷⁹

Bubbes Join the Gray Migration: Ethnic Diversity Among Older Floridians

“Bubbe” and “Zayde” - affectionate names for grandmother and grandfather - are the latest additions to my small Yiddish vocabulary. I stumbled across the words while conducting research on ethnicity and aging in the Jewish American Archives. Terms of endearment such as these conjure up images of old-fashioned immigrant elders. According to a 1978 story in the *National Jewish Monthly* traditional bubbes and zaydes, “have their children and grandchildren to dinner every Friday night.” Zayde recites kiddush over a table laden with Bubbe's home-made challa, potatoes, and fish stew.⁷⁸⁰ By mid-to-late-twentieth-century, however, growing numbers of bubbes and zaydes celebrated the Jewish Sabbath under very different circumstances. Having departed their hometowns for Florida's retirement

779. Basha is quoted in Barbabra Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (NY: E.P. Dutton, 1978), 253.

780. Kiddush is a Jewish blessing recited before Friday's Sabbath dinner. Challa is braided bread that is a traditional part of the meal. Ghita Levine, “The Search for Bubbe and Zayde: Today's Grandparents Are Busy, Busy, Busy,” *National Jewish Observer*, Jan. 1978.

hotels and condominiums, they spent Friday evenings alone in high-rises with ocean views or met in communal dining rooms where they broke bread with other seniors.

A large majority of Florida's post-war retirees were drawn from the white middle- and working-classes, but it is mistake to assume that the suntanned seniors who crowded park benches and shuffleboard courts across the state experienced old age in similar ways. Florida's retirement frontier was ethnically diverse. Italian-American elders departed Hoboken and the Bronx for Spring Hill and Lake Worth. French-Canadian snow birds flocked to winter retreats in Fort Lauderdale. Finnish-American retirees from Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Michigan formed ethnic enclaves in Boca Raton.⁷⁸¹ As growing numbers of Jewish Americans from across the Northeast and Central United States joined the gray migration, they settled in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties. By 1980 the Jewish population within this tri-county area reached more than half a million, the second largest Jewish community in the country.⁷⁸² All of these migrant groups arrived with more than their pension plans. They carried a lifetime of cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and kinship ties with them. When they transplanted their ethnic identities and histories in Florida's sandy soil, they shaped the retirement villages, mobile home parks, and condominiums they inhabited. And, as retirees moved away from family and friends, they were also transformed. Ethnic elders created new community associations and support systems in Florida and accommodated old beliefs and practices to changing circumstances.

Retirees Shoshannah Spector, Mrs. Eisler, and Etta H. were among the wave of

781. Jon Nordheimer, "Canadians Who Find a Winter Haven in Florida Bring Separatism Along," *New York Times*, April 8, 1987; Eleanor Palo Stoller, "Ethnicity in the Informal Networks of Older Sunbelt Migrants: A Case History of the Finns in Florida," in Donald Gelfand and Charles Barresi, *Ethnic Dimensions of Aging* (NY: Springer, 1987), 124; Gary Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 139-140.

782. Ira Sheskin, *Demographic Study of the Greater Miami Jewish Community* (Miami: Greater Miami Jewish Federation, 1984).

Jewish elders who settled in post-war Florida. They and the hundreds of thousands of bubbes and zaydes who joined them are the subject of this chapter:

An accomplished teacher, Shoshannah Spector grew up in Israel. She immigrated to New York as an adult and later moved to Miami Beach at the invitation of the Hebrew Academy, where she worked for twenty years. “After [all that time], you feel like taking a sabbatical.” she explained. Spector was not the sort of retiree to sit still, however. “A teacher should ... have the chance to see America. I went to Alaska and California. I learned a lot.” Having completed her travels, Spector returned to the classroom, this time as a volunteer.⁷⁸³

Unlike Spector, Mrs. Eisler welcomed retirement as a chance to put her feet up. In a 1956 interview about the Boulevard, Florida's first retirement hotel, seventy-seven year old Eisler exclaimed: “This place is just right for people our age.” A Brooklyn native, Eisler enjoyed the kosher meals served in the hotel dining room, lively card games on the patio, and Yiddish sing-a-longs on the beach.⁷⁸⁴

Ninety-eight-year-old Etta H. worked hard all her life and could only dream of life in a retirement hotel. Etta and her husband migrated to Miami in 1976 after their old neighborhood became too dangerous. Etta's husband was blind and required constant care. So did her emotionally disturbed sixty-seven year old son who lived at home. Etta did all of the housekeeping, shopping, and cooking, noting that if she became ill, there would be no one to look after her family.⁷⁸⁵

These vignettes demonstrate the great diversity among the Jewish aged. Jewish retirees to South Florida enjoyed varying degrees of health, wealth, and education. Some were established residents of the Sunshine State, others were recent arrivals. Many had emigrated to the United States as children and young adults. Others were American born. They identified as Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox Jews. Some reaped pleasure out of

783. Oral history interview with Shoshannah Spector, Cassette C-693, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

784. Barton Hickman, “Luxury Hotels Converted for Budget Living Cater to Sun-Seeking Oldsters,” *Miami Herald*, April 1, 1956.

785. Aristides J Millas and Claudia M Rogers, *The Development of Mobility Criteria for the Elderly within the Context of a Neighborhood: An Interdisciplinary Research Project Supported by the University of Miami Institute for the Study of Aging* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1979), 49, 50, 51-52

retirement. Others struggled under difficult circumstances.

Despite numerous differences, however, Jewish retirees shared much in common. This chapter highlights aspects of history and culture that helped to shape the later lives Jewish migrants to Greater Miami, particularly Miami Beach. These included the creation of a strong ethnic fellowship, a perceived cultural gap between old and young Jews, and the Jewish tradition of community outreach and organization. I focus particular attention on female retirees and suggest that the generational experiences of Eastern European immigrant women and their daughters provided many bubbes with the skills and self-esteem needed to combat the isolation and poverty which often accompanies old age.

Gerontologists frequently highlight the impact of ethnicity and gender on the aging process.⁷⁸⁶ Minority status combined with linguistic and cultural barriers may prevent ethnic elders from receiving needed assistance. Older ethnic women appear to be doubly at risk. Historically women endured disproportionate hardships in later life. Those who stayed home to raise children were dependent on their husbands' benefits. Women in the working world often labored for low wages and received smaller pension benefits than male workers. On the whole, women lived longer than men and were at greater risk of institutionalization. While these disadvantages cannot be overlooked, it is important to consider the resources of the elderly themselves. The bubbes and zaydes who migrated to South Florida drew on rich traditions to guide and support them as they responded to the opportunities and challenges retirement and old age afforded.

“In Search of What We Have Lost”: Jewish Retirees, Americanization, and the Generation Gap

786. Eva Kahana, et. al., “Adaptation to Institutional Life Among Polish, Jewish, and Western European Elderly,” in Charles Barresi and Donald Stull, eds., *Ethnic Elderly and Long-Term Care* (NY: Springer, 1993), 145; Stoller, “Ethnicity in the Informal Networks of Older Sunbelt Migrants,” 122.

Miami Beach “was the 'Land of Milk and Honey'” in the minds of many Jewish retirees. They flocked from New York, New Jersey, and Chicago in search of warm weather, recreation, and easy living -- and most of all, in search of fellowship.⁷⁸⁷ Migrants to Miami Beach were welcomed into a community that was familiar and comfortable. Many retirees had frequented the Beach in earlier years, spending family vacations in the Jewish-run establishments that rapidly grew in number during the building boom of the late 1940s and 1950s.⁷⁸⁸ Migrants often followed in the footsteps of friends and relations who had already made South Florida a permanent home. The geography and style of life in Miami Beach, moreover, echoed the big-city world most Jewish retirees were accustomed to. This was particularly true of South Beach, an ethnically rich, high density, “urban village” at the tip of Miami Beach and home to the city's largest senior population.⁷⁸⁹

Miami Beach retirees Shoshannah Spector, Mrs. Eisler, and Etta H. were enveloped in a tight-knit Jewish community. A study by the Greater Miami Jewish Federation revealed that eighty-eight percent of Jewish residents over the age of fifty considered being Jewish an “important” or “very important” part of their personal identity.⁷⁹⁰ Miami Beach retirees recalled the early years of Jewish settlement in America's big cities. They remembered communities where extended family lived near by and neighbors met in temple every day.

787. David Scheinbaum, “David Scheinbaum's Miami Beach,” in Lillian Ross ed, *Getting Around Jewish Miami* (Miami, FL: Central Agency for Jewish Education, 1988), 12; Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (NY: Free Press, 1994), 2, 27-28.

788. Harold Mehling, “Is Miami Beach Jewish?” in Abraham Lavender, ed, *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 121-122; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 31-50.

789. Millas and Rogers, *The Development of Mobility Criteria*, 49, 50, 51-52; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 46.

790. Sheskin, *Demographic Study*, 31.

Mothers kept a kosher home and Yiddish voices filled the air.⁷⁹¹ “In our younger years, the adults spoke Yiddish. They spoke it regularly,” remembered Miami Beach retiree, Clara Fine. “That’s why I speak fluent Yiddish ... Our home was always open. [Neighbors] used to congregate there. They would sit and discuss the news ... They would discuss so many subjects.”⁷⁹²

The camaraderie of those early days was transplanted to Miami Beach in large measure. Migrants met in Lummus park to play pinochle. They were active members of the Jewish War Veterans, B'nai B'rith, Hadassah, and the Council of Jewish Women. They dined together at Wolfie's and the Concorde Cafeteria. In the evenings they gathered for Yiddish sing-a-longs and dances at the Twenty-First Street Community Center.⁷⁹³ Friends and neighbors looked out for one another. Gertrude W, a seventy-eight-year-old South Beach resident with an ailing husband spoke fondly of her network of friends. Anna altered Gertrude's clothing. Norman frequently invited Gertrude and her husband over for dinner. The next-door neighbor visited daily to see if there was anything the couple needed.⁷⁹⁴

Such community closeness could be bitter sweet, however, for these valued friendships were born out of necessity as well as love. There was a real sense among these seniors, and indeed among elderly Jews across the country, that their way of life was coming to an end. The Northern neighborhoods of their youth often existed only in photographs and memories. Children left home to attend college and did not return. Families moved to the

791. Bernard Warach, “Status of the Jewish Elderly in the United States” (Unpublished paper presented at the Symposium on Aging in the Jewish World, organized by the JDC-Brookdale Institute, Jerusalem, June 30-July 5, 1985, Jerusalem, Israel), 26-27; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 4-6.

792. Oral History Interview with Clara Fine, Cassette C-691, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

793. Millas and Rogers, *The Development of Mobility Criteria*, 120-123, Sandy Schneir, “Oldsters Find Zest in Life,” *Miami News*, Nov 27, 1959.

794. Millis and Rogers, *The Development of Mobility Criteria*, 178.

suburbs. Poverty grew in once solidly working- and middle-class neighborhoods.⁷⁹⁵ It was with hope and sadness, therefore, that many older Jews migrated to Miami. “Where does retirement fit best?,” pondered a writer in the *Jewish Monthly*. “Ideally, we should retire where we have worked and raised families. But since our old communities ... have fallen apart, we come to [South Florida] in search of what we have lost: a community, or a reasonable facsimile.”⁷⁹⁶

As Americanization loosened the bonds that held old immigrant neighborhoods together, more than geographical distance separated retirees from younger generations.⁷⁹⁷ Men and women who survived the Holocaust feared that their children and grandchildren would not understand the importance of the Jewish legacy. Many disapproved when family members married outside of the faith or raised children in impersonal subdivisions where religion and ethnicity were reserved for sabbath and special occasions. These concerns created tension between aging parents and their children.⁷⁹⁸ “Someone summed up the status of Jewishness in America, in this manner,” explained Rabbi Max Shapiro, retired after years of service to Miami’s Beth David Temple. “The grandfather says, ‘I am sure of myself and my grandchildren. I’m not so sure about my own sons and daughters.’ What does he mean? I’m sure of myself. I still have my loyalties, my ties. My grandchildren, I’m afraid, will be

795. Mark Effron, “Fear and Poverty on the Lower East Side: Left Behind, Left Alone,” *National Jewish Monthly*, April 14, 1974; Stephen Berkowitz, “Abandoned,” *Present Tense* (Autumn 1976), 76, 78; Yonah Ginsberg, *Jews in a Changing Neighborhood: The Study of Mattapan* (NY: Free Press, 1976).

796. “How Happy Retiree?,” *National Jewish Monthly*, August 1974.

797. Effron, “Fear and Poverty,” 15, 24.

798. Institute for Jewish Policy Planning and Research of the Synagogue Council of America, “A Rationale for Synagogue Programming with the Jewish Aging,” *Analysis* (March 17, 1975), 3, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; Boaz Kahana, “Jewish Aged and their Families: Cross-National Perspectives,” (unpublished paper presented at the Symposium on Aging in the Jewish World, organized by the JDC-Brookdale Institute, July 5, 1985, Jerusalem, Israel), 12-13; Jo-Ann Hammack, “The Generation Gap: Attitudes and Practices of Three Generations of American Jews,” (Unpublished thesis, Masters of Social Work, Barry College, Miami, FL, 1969), 1-2.

devoid of all Jewishness. I'm sure of them. But my sons and daughters, I don't know where they stand – they are not here and not there.”⁷⁹⁹

In their darkest moments, retirees feared that they might be forgotten altogether by their Americanized families. Rumors about deceased migrants left to a pauper's grave by far flung children circulated on the Beach. “Unfortunately, Hevrah Kadishah⁸⁰⁰ is more important than ever,” reported burial society member Hyman Chabner. “I witness very often the refusal of sons and daughters – living in different parts of the country - when we call them up [and say] 'your mother died ... What are you going to do as far as burial?' The answer is ... shocking ... 'You can take my mother and throw her in the ocean ... I'll have nothing to do with it.' ... Of course, we do our part. The mother is buried in a respectable place ... What if anything could a son possibly have against a mother? Isn't she entitled from raising him and bringing him up ... to be given a proper burial?”⁸⁰¹

Goldie Goldstein, a retiree and active member of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation made a similar observation. She condemned what she described as a lack of empathy and support among selfish and self-absorbed children, too busy with their own lives up North to tend to aging parents. “The Jewish elderly that we have down here ... are really our responsibility today,” she argued. “It is sad that their children do not do anything about it ... In so many cases, we could give you a laundry list of names of clients, of people who need care whose children just send them down here and don't help them.”⁸⁰²

799. Oral History Interview with Rabbi Max Shapiro, 197? (date not listed), Cassette C-672, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. For a similar perspective, see Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*, 198.

800. The Hevrah Kadishah is a Jewish burial society which performs acts of charity.

801. Oral History Interview with Hyman Chabner, June 5, 1975, Cassette C-693, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

802. Oral History Interview with Goldie Goldstein, August 27, 1981, Cassette C-679, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff's 1978 study of daily life among the 300 Jewish members of the Aliyah Senior Citizens' Center in Venice Beach, California, drew similar conclusions. In *Number Our Days*, the author described these elderly Eastern-European immigrants – who like the seniors on Miami Beach drew strength from one another's fellowship - as “sorely neglected” by their successful, Americanized progeny. “These elders ... are cut off from their family and children,” she argued. “From time to time, relatives visit them or take them back to their homes for holidays or to spend the night, but on a day-to-day basis, the old people effectively are on their own.” The Center seniors themselves generally agreed with this assessment. They expressed great pride their children's professional and economic success, but believed that they had lost a large measure of filial respect and devotion in the process. “We could give our American children nice clothes, good food, education, but we couldn't give them what our fathers and mothers gave us,” insisted one elder. “It all went out from us, all that respect for the mama and the papa, the love of the home. American children didn't receive that memory.”⁸⁰³

Such critiques of post-war Jewish family life are biting. The evidence about both Venice Beach and Miami Beach retirees' individual family relationships is too sparse, however, to warrant such conclusions. We know little about these elders' extended family lives. In fact, the few families included in Myerhoff's study made concerted efforts to help elderly loved ones. The gulf separating these Jewish parents from their progeny is probably better explained as a cultural and class divide, rather than one of love and commitment. Many second and third-generation Jewish children led lives that little resembled those of their parents and grandparents who struggled hard to make ends meet and relied on a close-knit ethnic community as a vital form of support. This did not mean that the younger

803. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*, 8, 98.

generations abandoned aging family members, however. In fact, a number of sociological surveys revealed that Jewish families of Eastern-European decent maintained strong bonds and that their elders were more likely to report being close to children and grandchildren than were seniors with Western European backgrounds.⁸⁰⁴

Many immigrant parents, moreover, may have simply preferred the company of life-long friends who shared similar beliefs and customs, to life in an impersonal subdivision with Americanized children who worked all day and did not observe Old World traditions. For example, in a concluding chapter of *Number Our Days*, Basha, a member of the Aliyah Center, asserts that “in this country we know already, we can't depend on the children.”⁸⁰⁵ Yet earlier in her manuscript, Myerhoff noted that Basha's daughter repeatedly expressed concern for her mother. “Basha's daughter calls her once a week and worries about her mother living alone and in a deteriorated neighborhood,” she observed. “The daughter has often invited Basha to come and live with her, but she refuses.”⁸⁰⁶ In the end, it is Basha who resists joining a multi-generational household. The older woman cherishes her life at the Center and can not imagine surrendering her independence. “What would I do with myself there in her big house, alone all day, when the children are at work?” she asked. “No one to talk to ... Nobody speaks Yiddish ... Here I have lived for thirty-one years. I have my friends ... I can

804. See for example: Kahana, et. al., “Adaptation to Institutional Life,” 150, 153; William Mitchell, “Proximity Patterns of the Urban Jewish Kindred,” *Man*, Vol. 65 (Sept.-Oct. 1965), 137-140; Robert Winch, Scott Greer, and Rae Lesser Blumberg, “Ethnicity and Extended Familism in an Upper-Middle-Class Suburb,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 1967), 265-272; Bert Adams, “Isolation, Function, and Beyond: American Kinship in the 1960s,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Nov. 1970), 587-588; Sherry Rosen, “How the Jewish Elderly Differ,” *Jewish Advocate*, July 6, 1989; Zev Harel, “Jewish Aged: Diversity in Need and Care Solutions,” in Laura Katz Olson, ed., *Age Through Ethnic Lenses: Caring for the Elderly in a Multicultural Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 152.

805. *Ibid.*, 196.

806. *Ibid.*, 2.

go to the Center whenever I like and always there's something doing there.”⁸⁰⁷

Finally, it is important to note that although many Jewish immigrants painted an idealistic picture of an unquestioned Old-World commitment to the aged, many of these retirees left their own elderly parents behind when they traveled to America in search of a brighter future. “One woman had never gotten over the sense of loss at leaving her parents in Eastern Europe, so she could not bear feeling that her son might abandon his family responsibilities and, by implication, herself,” observed historian Sydney Stahl Weinberg in a survey of Jewish immigrant women's ongoing relationships with their adult children.⁸⁰⁸ The elders of Myerhoff's study endured similar feelings of guilt and fear of abandonment. The elders “often say, that children must leave their parents, that they left their own families to emigrate when it was necessary, and so they understand the distance between them and their own progeny is inevitable. But the truth is that they counted family ties as the only completely trustworthy relationship,” Myerhoff explained. “Covertly and almost unwillingly, they occasionally reflected on this, asking, 'Is this what our parents felt like when we left them? Did they deserve such treatment?’”⁸⁰⁹

For every son or daughter who rejected and dishonored their parents, there were many more who loved and cared for them no matter the distance. Still, stories about seniors dying unwanted and alone clearly reflected retirees' growing sense that they were the last of their kind. On Miami Beach, retirees' rejection by powerful members of the community only exacerbated such feelings. City boosters had courted these once healthy and vital retirees and their Social Security checks during the 1950s and 1960s. As these seniors grew older and

807. Ibid., 2.

808. Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1988), 247.

809. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*, 107.

frailer and savings dwindled, however, their increasing needs were met with lukewarm concern and even callousness by a number of key city officials and businessmen. Rather than respecting the rich Jewish heritage that flourished in South Beach senior centers, thrift shops, and retirement hotels, a number of community leaders – many of them, Jewish – wanted to raze the area's crumbling buildings and relocate the thousands of older residents from the valuable ocean-front real estate. An executive with the South Florida Hotel and Motel Association summarized the redevelopment effort in this manner: “We regard them [the South Beach elderly] with the same respect and affection as we regard our own mothers and fathers,” but, sentiment is sentiment. Business is business. Bubbes, it seemed, were bad for business.⁸¹⁰

While local boosters regarded the Jewish aged as a deterrent to the tourist trade and an overwhelming financial burden, other community leaders offered a different perspective. Greater Miami Jewish Federation members like Goldie Goldstein rushed to the migrants' defense, arguing that these seniors' provided Jewish Americans with an invaluable link to their past. They deserved nothing less than full community support and respect. As a result, growing numbers of programs and services took root in South Florida, counteracting city redevelopment efforts and providing a large measure of protection to the area's frail and destitute elders.⁸¹¹

Photographer David Scheinbaum also worked to preserve South Beach's vital, though endangered, Jewish enclave. The artist felt a strong bond with the neighborhood because his own grandfather had retired to Miami Beach in the early 1970s. After his grandfather's death,

810. For more on the history of the city's treatment of elderly Jewish migrants, see: “Sun, Sand, and Slum Clearance,” a subsection of Chapter Two. See also: David Silverberg, “The 'Old' Poor and the 'New': What's Happening to Them?,” *Present Tense*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring 1977), 63. Quote from: Jon Nordheimer, “Housing Troubles Tossed to Metro,” *Miami Herald*, March 23, 1967.

811. Silverberg, “The 'Old' Poor and the 'New.'”

Scheinbaum traveled South to capture this unique senior culture on film. His famous collection of black and white pictures presents a complex view of aging on the Beach. Retirement in the “land of milk and honey” offered fellowship and isolation, strength of spirit and frailty of body, pride in past traditions and a resignation that Jewish life and culture was changing. White haired, leather-skinned men and women napped alone on pool-side loungers. They sat side by side in silent solidarity on park benches. Widowed elders kept tidy hotel rooms where they displayed their family letters and photographs. “This is the last generation of its kind,” the artist and activist concluded. “What we have here is a million years of experience walking around ... These people are our mishpachah. We have a responsibility to them.”⁸¹²

“Honor the Face of the Old Man”?: Synagogues as Centers of Pediatric Judaism

Judaic verse and tradition demand a respect for the elderly. “You shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and thou shalt fear thy God,” declares Leviticus. The Talmud celebrates the wisdom of age, reminding the faithful that, “He who learns from the young, eats unripe grapes and drinks new wine; he who learns from the old eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.”⁸¹³ Many post-war Temples, however, concentrated their efforts on retaining young members rather than meeting the needs of their oldest congregates. As a result, Jewish retirees often felt like invisible members of the community even inside their own synagogues.

Like the elderly, the rabbinate felt deeply concerned about the effects of

812. “Mishpachah” is a Yiddish word meaning “family.” Quote from: Scheinbaum, “David Scheinbaum’s Miami Beach,” 12.

813. Rabbi Albert Minda, “Religious Foundations – The Status of the Aging,” in *Judaism, the Synagogue, and the Aging*, (Unpublished paper presented in a Sabbath Study Session held on Saturday, May 26, 1962, NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations), 1-2, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

Americanization on Jewish youth. They worried that an increasing trend in interfaith marriages, combined with a life of suburban ease left young American Jews complacent and ignorant of their history and religion. "Never before in American history has the Jewish people been subject to as thorough a process of integration as ... today," warned the Central Conference of American Rabbis. "There are 300,000 Jewish youth on our campuses around the country ... All but a few are totally indifferent to Jewish life there ... A generation ago, disaffected young Jews tended to remain ... near or within the Jewish community. Today the disinterested go far and put down their roots in other social enclaves."⁸¹⁴ "The young man today thinks too much of what he calls enjoyment," echoed Miami Rabbi Simon April in a 1963 article in the *Jewish Floridian*. "The religion of a young man is largely a suppressed thing ... His relationship with the synagogue is nil or lukewarm. According to his way of thinking, there is nothing in the synagogue to give him by way of diversion. To him, the synagogue is a good place for the rabbi, children, old folks, who have nothing else to do."⁸¹⁵

In response, American synagogues focused special attention on religious education, youth groups, and the dynamics of young family life.⁸¹⁶ A review of Miami's *Temple Israel Bulletin* from the 1950s and 1960s, for example, reveals a plethora of programs designed especially for high school and college students and their parents. Sermons dealt with topics such as "Jewish Youth Faces the Future," "Questions College Students Ask," and "The

814. *Annual Convention Proceedings, Central Conference of American Rabbis, June 22-24, 1966, Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Canada*, Manuscripts Collection 34, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

815. Rabbi Simon April, "Rabbi Poses a Question: Our Youth a Problem?," *Jewish Floridian*, May 24, 1963.

816. Daniel Jeremy Silver, "Jewish Identity, Jewish Survival and Israel," *Central Conference of American Rabbis, Eighty-Eighth Annual Convention, June 20-23, 1977*, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; April, "Rabbi Poses Question"; "Intermarriage Problem is Baffling," *Jewish Floridian*, March 19, 1965; "Worldwide Conference on Intermarriage is Urged," *Jewish Floridian*, Feb, 16, 1968.

Challenge and Threat of the College Years.”⁸¹⁷ In 1967 Temple Israel's Rabbi Narot introduced “Letters to the Now Generation,” a weekly *Bulletin* column also intended to “bridge the generation gap.”⁸¹⁸

Unfortunately, America's oldest temple members – those who could offer youngsters the most direct connection to Jewish history and tradition – remained largely overlooked.⁸¹⁹ “Our emphasis has been on pediatric Judaism,” admitted Robert Katz, chairman of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Committee on the Aging, a group created in 1961 to respond the growing problems of aging congregations. “Our sources need to be mined for insights [and] ... values appropriate to those who are ripe for reflection and theological reaffirmation ... Aging becomes problematic ... not so much because of physical disability but because of a value system which glorifies youth and stresses achievement and status.”⁸²⁰ Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations voiced similar concerns. “Our synagogues have largely been centers of pediatric Judaism, 'Juvenile Jewries,' as some have designated them. We have concentrated on our children – and this has been good ... But then what? Except for the pastoral functions of the rabbi and

817. See for example: “Jewish Youth Faces the Future,” *Temple Israel Bulletin*, Vol. 8, Jan. 24, 1947; “For Collegians and Their Parents,” *Temple Israel Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 20, Jan. 16, 1959; “Questions College Students Ask,” *Temple Israel Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 21, Jan. 23, 1959; “Parents of College Students: Please Give Us Their Names!,” *Temple Israel Bulletin*, Vol. 21, No. 9, Nov. 6, 1959; “The Challenge and the Threat of the College Years,” *Temple Israel Bulletin*, Vol. 26, No. 40, May 14, 1965.

818. Rabbi Joseph Narot, “Letters to the NOW Generation: Introduction,” *Temple Israel Bulletin*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Sept. 8, 1967.

819. “Report of the Committee on Aging,” *Year Book*, Vol. LXXI (NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1961), 38-40, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; “Synagogues Told How to Reach Neglected Aging,” *Jewish Week – American Examiner*, August 19, 1979, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; “UAHC Rabbi Says Synagogues Neglect Elderly,” *American Israelite*, July 26, 1979, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; “Senior Disfranchisement,” *Synagogue Aging* (November 1975), American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

820. Robert Katz, “Report on the Committee on the Aging,” *Year Book*, Vol LXXI (Central Conference of American Rabbis: NY, 1962), 38, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

worship services, in most congregations we have few substantive programs for those who have retired. And I don't mean the infirm who need special care. I mean vital and vibrant people ... who still have plenty ... to contribute productively to American and Jewish life.”⁸²¹

In 1962 both the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations conducted conferences that examined aging in Judaism. These sessions culminated in a research study to determine the extent and character of senior citizen programs in synagogues across the country. Completed in 1966, the nation-wide survey concluded that older people were provided little opportunity or encouragement to participate in temple life. It recommended that rabbis and lay leaders better address the needs and talents of senior congregates.⁸²²

In Florida, Rabbi Sanford Shapero, Director of the Southeast Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, led the charge. A Miami resident, Shapero had long noted the loneliness that haunted so many wrinkled faces. He took special interest in the religious needs of Jews living in retirement hotels, condominiums, and nursing homes. In the past, the elderly “played a vital role in transmitting culture and mores to the next generation,” he concluded. “[Today] our older citizens are strangers in the world they helped to create.” It was the synagogue's responsibility, Shapero argued, to reunite the generations. He deemed the synagogue a perfect place for younger Jews to connect with seniors. After all, the synagogue was a trusted institution. Most elderly Jews had been members of congregations

821. Maurice Eisendrath, “On Retirement,” in *Aging and Retirement* (NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 3-4.

822. Robert Katz, “Report on the Committee on the Aging,” *Year Book*, Vol LXXII (Central Conference of American Rabbis: NY, 1963), 44, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; Max Feder, “The Senior Citizens Program in Our Temples,” (NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregation, 1966), iii, 5, 11-13, 17-18, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; Irving Spiegel, “Aged Plan Urged on Reform Jews: Programs for Elderly Called Responsibility of Religion,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1962.

throughout their lives.⁸²³ The rabbi feared, however, that many migrant retirees had long since given up on temple.⁸²⁴

In their move South, retirees did not leave their faith behind. In fact, the elderly proved more dedicated than younger adults to religious practices such as keeping a kosher home and observing the Sabbath. Demographic data confirmed Shapero's concern about temple participation, however. Many retirees were unlikely to affiliate with a synagogue once they settled in Florida. Membership in Greater Miami synagogues reached a peak of fifty-four percent for the thirty-five to forty-nine-year-old age group, and fell steadily among older adults. Only thirty-five percent of Dade County retirees belonged to a temple.⁸²⁵ Deteriorating health, limited mobility, and reduced incomes, accounted for some seniors' reluctance to participate in organized religious services and activities.⁸²⁶ Shapero admitted, however, that synagogues themselves left much to be desired. Such membership patterns, he asserted, "signifies that a redevelopment of program, and especially outreach may indeed be pressing."⁸²⁷

823. Sidney Katz, "Housing and Living Arrangements," in *Judaism, the Synagogue and the Aging* (NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1962), 38, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

824. Rabbi Sanford Shapero, "The Vintage Years: General View and Jewish Challenge," in *Aging and Retirement*, 29, 32, 37-38.

825. Thirty percent of Dade County's Jewish elderly (those over sixty-five) kept a kosher home, compared with fifteen percent of Jewish households as a whole. Sheskin, *Demographic Study of the Greater Miami*, 20-31.

826. David Moberg, "Religion and the Aging Family," *Family Coordinator*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan., 1972), 48, 51; Synagogue membership dues, temple events, and charity contributions often cost more than Miami retirees on fixed incomes felt they could afford. See: Edward Cohen, "High Cost of Synagogue Affiliation," *Jewish Floridian*, Aug. 27, 1965.

827. The Christian church also contemplated ways in which religious services and programs might better serve too frequently overlooked elderly congregants. See: "Interest Proved at White Temple Church," *Miami Herald*, May 5, 1956; "Miami Church Program Seeks to Change Image of Retirement," *Aging*, Oct. 1971. Paul Maves, "Ministering to Older People," *Religion in Life*, 18 (Summer 1949), 347-383; David Moberg, "The Christian Religion and Personal Adjustment in Old Age," *American Sociological Review*, 18 (Feb. 1953), 87-90; National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., *The Fulfillment Years in Christian Education* (National Council of Churches of Christ, 1953); Virginia Stafford, *Older Adults in the Church* (Nashville, TN: The Methodist Church, 1953); Moberg, "Religion and the Aging Family," 51-58; Walter Beattie, "A Research Project in

Shapero noted that rabbis lacked the training necessary to best serve older people. He developed gerontology courses for clergy and called on congregations to create seminars to teach adults and children alike about the aging process. He urged congregations to document the out-migration of elderly members and to develop a system of communication between these seniors' home-town and retirement temples. He developed a surrogate rabbinate in South Florida. This group, composed of retired rabbis, served elderly Jews in nursing homes and condominiums. Shapero also urged the rabbinate to stimulate the active participation of older people both within the temple and beyond. "We should utilize their wisdom and direct them to use their voting power to their own good ends," he wrote. "We must inspire this aging community to involve themselves in the process of 'community.' We must assist the aged to develop positive programs of self-determination and self-government."⁸²⁸

**"Jewish Women are Quick to Organize":
Bubbes Draw on Lessons Learned in Youth**

Theology and history combined to make older Jews particularly amenable to community organization. Judaism's powerful social message urges the faithful to maintain a duty not only to God and family but to the wider world. "The ethics of the Covenant were not given to the individual but to the entire nation," wrote Biblical scholar Yehezkel Kauffman. "For the profits, justice and righteousness are not a private affair. The entire nation is responsible for the moral state that prevails in it." The needs of the poor, the lonely, and the ailing are a community responsibility.⁸²⁹ Among Jews who immigrated to America

Church Services to the Aging," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 1963), 108-110; Quote from Sanford Shapero, "Meeting the Religious Needs of Elderly Jewish Migrants," in Carter C. Osterbind, ed, *Migration, Mobility and Aging, A Report on the 23rd Annual Southern Conference on Gerontology* (Gainesville, FL: Center for Gerontological Studies and Programs, University of Florida, 1974), 150.

828. Shapero, "The Vintage Years," 29, 32, 36-38; Shapero, "Meeting the Religious Needs," 155-156.

829. Kauffman quoted in Bezalel Sherman, "The Place of the Community Center in Jewish Life," *Annual*

from Eastern Europe, the harsh realities of childhood and early adult life reinforced religious teachings. Organization and interdependence were a matter of survival in the Pale, a poverty-stricken territory to which most Jews were restricted by Imperial Russia. Segregated from participation in almost all aspects of the larger society, Jewish residents developed their own self-government. Various communal networks provided support for the sick and the destitute, allocated and collected taxes for public works, and maintained social order.⁸³⁰ This tradition of interdependence buoyed Eastern-European Jewish immigrants as they adjusted to life in America's big cities. During the late-eighteen- and early-nineteen-hundreds, Jewish newcomers created countless welfare associations, including relief societies, hospitals, and homes for the aged. Immigrants cared for ill neighbors, joined fraternal groups, and organized labor unions. If there was a need within the community, an organization likely formed to address the problem.⁸³¹

Such community-consciousness had enriched the young lives of many older Jews who brought the values of outreach and activism with them to Florida. A 1961 study by the American Jewish Committee revealed that ninety percent of Dade County Jews belonged to

Conference of the Association of Jewish Center Workers, May 27-30, 1973 (NY: Association of Jewish Center Workers, 1973), 25. See also: Irving Kane, "In Quest of Purpose," *Assembly Highlights* [A newsletter of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds], Nov. 10-13, 1960, 11; Abraham Lavender, "Shalom – with a Southern Accent: An Examination of Jews in the South," in Abraham Lavender ed, *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 80; Rabbi Abraham Heschel, "To Grow in Wisdom," *Aging and Retirement*, 11; *Assembly Highlights* (1960), 11.

830. Richard Benkin, "Ethnicity and Organization: Jewish Communities in Eastern Europe and the United States," *Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Autumn, 1978), 614-616.

831. Gretel Conal, "Social Service Idealism in the Sixties – An Example," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* (June 1962), 394-395; "Introduction," in Michael Dobkowski, ed, *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations* (Greenwood Press: NY, 1986), xi; Lucy Steinitz, "Jewish Communal Responses to Older People's Needs," in *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations*, 520; Michael Dobkowski, "Refugee Landsmannschaften," in *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations*, 603-604; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 7-8; Benkin, "Ethnicity and Organization," 614-623.

at least one organization. Twenty-nine percent belonged to five or more.⁸³² The report surveyed Jews ranging in age from their mid-twenties to mid-eighties, but as the 1960 court appearance of Lena Ray demonstrates, older Jews were among the most active members of the community.⁸³³

Retiree Lena Ray moved to Miami Beach from Rochester, New York in 1957. She joined the Florida branch of the American Civil Liberties Union and was elected Secretary of the local Emma Lazarus Organization. Founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, Emma Lazarus celebrated Jewish culture and battled anti-semitism through rallies, fund raisers, and letter-writing campaigns. By mid-century the organization was composed mostly of older immigrant women. In 1960 the Miami Beach chapter counted sixty members, all over the age of fifty.⁸³⁴

“We are all elderly women,” Ray stated demurely on the witness stand at the Dade County Court House. Despite graying hair, Ray and her Emma Lazarus sisters were capable of stirring up controversy. The group was banned from Flamingo Park after a 1954 rally drew a crowd of more than 1,000 people and resulted in complaints of public disorder and accusations of communist activities. Six years later Ray was in court challenging the ban and defending the organization's right to use the park. The determined Ray won her case and by

1969 the Mayor of Miami Beach signed a proclamation declaring it Emma Lazarus Day in

832. *Bayville Survey of Jewish Attitudes: A Report on the Findings in a Survey of Attitudes of Affiliated Jews Residing in Dade Co, Florida* (NY: American Jewish Committee, 1961), 10, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

833. *Transcript of Proceedings: State of Florida, ex rel, Esther Feldman and Lena Ray, individually and as members of the Emma Lazarus Organization of Miami Beach, Petitioners, v.s. City of Miami Beach, Florida, November 2, 1960*, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. For more on older retirees active involvement in the Miami's Jewish community outreach, see: “Senior Citizens Show New Aggressiveness in Seeking Voice in Community Affairs,” *Jewish Floridian*, June 16, 1961.

834. *Transcript of Proceedings: State of Florida, ex rel, Esther Feldman and Lena Ray; “Institutional History: Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women's Clubs,”* (c. 1990), *Records of the Emma Lazarus Jewish Women's Clubs*, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

the city .⁸³⁵

Like Ray, Goldie Goldstein was an active member of the community. Born in Romania, Goldstein had been involved in numerous organizations throughout her long life. She worked at various times as a member of the 52 Club and the PTA, as a board member of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, as budget director of Community Chest, and as President of the Women's Division of the Jewish Consumptive Relief Organization. "I've been a social worker my whole life, only without a degree," she explained in an interview with the Dade County Jewish Historical Society. Goldstein described her current positions as budget director of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation and as a delegate to the White House Conference on Aging. She noted that Jewish commitment to community welfare was alive and well and as necessary as it had ever been. The large number of frail elderly on Miami Beach were the focus of much of her concern. "The Jewish Federation moved in with the ... Activity Center which provides ... senior recreation and 2,000 hot kosher meals a day," she stated. As a delegate to the White House Conference on Aging, Goldstein looked forward to exchanging information with volunteers and government officials from across the country. "We have a tremendous service project here. I feel that we are making strides, but there is a lot to be done for the elderly," she concluded. "At this conference we'll come to some decisions about how we can continue to help them and do even more than we are doing."⁸³⁶

Ray and Goldstein's stories highlight the crucial role that older women played in Miami's Jewish community. They were activists who demanded respect for themselves, their elderly neighbors, and their culture. They were social service organizers who helped to care for the frail and needy. These skills and values had been practiced throughout their lives.

835. *Transcript of Proceedings: State of Florida, ex rel, Esther Feldman and Lena Ray.*

836. Oral History Interview with Goldie Goldstein, August 27, 1981.

Like many older Jewish women, Goldstein first learned the art of organizational outreach by observing her parents. "Father was very community conscious," she recalled. "We lived in the kind of a place where you could go six blocks from your house and help somebody. Back then, the Jewish community was growing tremendously from the standpoint of organizational structure. They were organizing themselves. The Jews apparently know how to do this ... They'll face a situation head on and move in."⁸³⁷ "My mother became a real social worker and that's what she left with me," reflected Hattie L. in an interview with Syndey Stahl Weinberg. "I don't know how she did it, she didn't even speak English, but she was allowed in everywhere ... She used to take us along."⁸³⁸

Many Jewish women of Goldstein's generation cut their activist teeth as laborers in shops and factories. As young, unmarried wage-earners they contributed to their parents' household economy and gained autonomy and self-esteem in the process.⁸³⁹ Russian-Jewish women were active union members. In 1909 the Women's Trades Union League noted that "Jewish women are quick to organize."⁸⁴⁰ That same year young Jewish female laborers launched a thirteen-week strike among 30,000 workers to organize the International Ladies Garment Union.⁸⁴¹ By 1913 social reformer Mary Van Kleeck reported that "the Jewish girl...has a distinct sense of social responsibility," and noted that employers often considered

837. Ibid.

838. Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 142.

839. Kathie Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration: Gender, Ethnicity, and Work in the Lives of Jewish and Italian Women in New York, 1870-1924* (Albany, NY: State University of NY Press, 1996), 163-173; Paula Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States," in Judith Baskin, ed, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 312-336.

840. Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant," 312-336.

841. Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*, 151, 165, 171-173; Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant," 312-336.

Russian-Jewish women dangerous “agitators.”⁸⁴²

Jewish women comprised a large proportion of female wage earners during the early-to-mid 1900s, but their participation in the working world often ended upon marriage.

Russian-Jewish families attained economic stability more quickly than many other immigrant groups, and when they did, wives and mothers generally withdrew from the labor market.⁸⁴³

These housewives did not retire from the wider community, however. Jewish wives and mothers were active organizers. They coordinated mass boycotts in response to rising rent and food prices, and rallies and petition drives in support of women's suffrage. They even banded together in defiance of neighborhood gangsters.⁸⁴⁴

Now settled in Miami, South Beach, and North Miami Beach, these inveterate activists drew on the lessons learned in youth. They reconfigured the networks of outreach and support altered by time and separation from loved ones. Without children and working husbands to tend to, female retirees had more time to devote to one another. Older women composed the majority of Jewish retirees. In South Beach, they constituted fifty-two percent of the population and eighty-two percent of single-person households.⁸⁴⁵ Widows, often the oldest and frailest retirees, relied heavily on reciprocal relationships with friends and neighbors. Traditionally, Jewish women cared for aging parents.⁸⁴⁶ Now, often separated by hundreds of miles from their adult children, daughters were unable to provide daily

842. Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*, 165.

843. Sometimes these women supplemented husbands' incomes by taking in boarders or assisting in family-run businesses, but they rarely returned to wage work outside of the home.

844. Hyman, “Gender and the Immigrant,” 312-326; Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 127; Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*, 129-130.

845. Welfare Planning Council of Dade County, *Socio-Economic Diagnostic Study of the South Shore Area of Miami Beach, Florida* (Miami, FL: Welfare Planning Council of Dade County, 1968), 7.

846. Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 164.

assistance. When networks of friends could no longer supply all of the necessary support, Jewish organizations and leaders like Goldie Goldstein stepped in.

**“When I Hear Yiddish, Something in Me Goes Free”:
Jewish Agencies, Government Partnerships, and Cultural Programming**

Jewish agencies were widely recognized as innovative leaders in the field of gerontology and the expanding welfare state was anxious to collaborate. When Goldstein headed to the White House Conference on Aging, she contributed to an ongoing relationship between Jewish elder-care organizations and the federal government. The community, for the most part, welcomed this partnership. Jewish elder-care organizations were often stretched to the limit due to a rapidly aging population, and government funding supported further innovation and programming.⁸⁴⁷ Goldstein's South Beach Activities Center was one the beneficiaries.⁸⁴⁸ Other projects bolstered by federal partnerships included vocational rehabilitation for handicapped seniors⁸⁴⁹; apartment housing for frail and needy elders;⁸⁵⁰ and

847. Beattie, “A Research Project in Church Services for the Aging,” 111-112; “Place of the Community Center in Jewish Life,” 25; “National Council of Jewish Women Joins Anti-Poverty Program Here,” *Jewish Floridian*, March 11, 1966; Robert Segal, “Impact of the Great Society on Us,” *Jewish Floridian*, April 22, 1966; “Social Work Confab Eyes Great Society,” *Jewish Floridian*, May 20, 1966; “Aged Care Gets Larger Fund Share,” *Jewish Floridian*, Oct 20, 1967; “Federal Government Wants Partnership with Jewish Agencies in Serving Aged,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Services* (June 1966), 373-374; “The Voice of Jewry on the Poverty War,” *Jewish Floridian* (November 24, 1967), 4A; Zev Harel, “Key Administration Figures Note Values in Community Center Works,” *Jewish Floridian*, March 30, 1962; “Age Take the Spotlight,” *Jewish Floridian*, Jan. 13, 1961; Harel, “Jewish Aged: Diversity in Need and Care Solutions,” 145-150; Steinitz, “Jewish Communal Response,” 520.

848. Miriam Scheinberg, “South Beach Activity Center Learns to Cooperate with Local Agencies and Organizations,” *Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Center Workers, May 27-30, 1973* (NY: Association of Jewish Center Workers, 1973), 44B.

849. “Jewish Vocational Services Proposes Rehabilitation Program for Federal Aid,” *Jewish Floridian*, July 1, 1960; “Federal Aid to Jewish Vocational Service,” *Jewish Floridian*, Sept 8, 1961; “Jewish Agency Gets U.S. Grant,” *Jewish Floridian*, March 13, 1964; “JVS Gets Federal Grant for War on Poverty,” *Jewish Floridian*, Jan 14, 1966; “Sheltered Workshops,” *Council Reports: Social Planning* (Nov. 1954), 1-4.

850. “Housing for Miami's Elderly Funded by H.U.D.,” *Federation*, Sept. 1976; “Housing Corporation Formed to Build, Operate Federation Apartment for Elderly,” *Federation*, Jan. 1978; “Federation Towers,” *Federation*, Oct. 1979; “Plans Underway for New Federation Housing,” *Federation*, May 1980; Jewish Federation Housing Slates Late 1982 Opening for 110 Apartment Unit,” *Federation*, Nov. 1981; “Senior Citizens Move Into Federation Gardens,” *Federation*, Nov. 1982.

emergency medical response services for the home-bound.⁸⁵¹

One particularly innovative service was the Senior Intervention Education Program developed in 1978 by the Jewish Community Centers of South Broward County. Inflation, rising medical costs, and emotional trauma vastly increased the numbers of older shop lifters appearing in South Florida court rooms during the mid-to-late 1970s. This voluntary intervention program offered first-time offenders over the age of sixty-five the opportunity to avoid the cost and embarrassment of trial in exchange for counseling and participation at a senior center. There was no fee for this service and the case was dismissed upon successful completion of the program. By 1982 the service had helped over 1,200 clients with a recidivism rate of less than twenty percent.⁸⁵²

The Social Workers in Action program – SWAT – offers another example of the Jewish community's ongoing commitment to government programs for the aged. In 1979 a group of Jewish social workers received a grant from the Administration on Aging to conduct a three-year demonstration project on geriatric home care. The SWAT team coordinated social workers, registered nurses, and home health aides who handled the case-work of frail elders inhabiting eight South Beach retirement residences. “Just as the police SWAT team attempts to create a sense of hopelessness in the perpetrator through the use of uniforms, equipment, etc., our SWAT team uses the same techniques to create a sense of hope – hope

851. Muriel Russell, “In Arms Reach,” *Innovative Services for the Elderly: A Program Information Exchange Guide* (NY: Council of Jewish Federations, 1982), 15-17, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati; “Lifeline,” *Federation*, May 1981; “Foundation-Funded Program Provides Security for Elderly,” *Federation*, March 1982; “Family Lifeline Grows,” *Federation*, Feb. 22, 1985; “New Program Provides Emergency Help to the Elderly,” *Federation*, March 6, 1987.

852. Phillip Levin, “Senior Intervention and Education Program,” in *Innovative Services for the Elderly*, 19-20; Jane Daugherty, “Crime: Old Problem with an Old Twist,” *Miami Herald*, Aug. 1, 1982; Lisa Hoffman, “Advocate Program Works for Seniors,” *Miami Herald*, Aug. 1, 1982.

for continued independence within the community,” explained the program's director.⁸⁵³ Such help and hope was desperately needed. Dade County's ongoing shortage of nursing home beds and a lack of government funding for home health care, combined with seniors' fear of institutionalization, created situations in which frail retirees struggled to live on their own without any assistance. At the end of his life, photographer David Scheinbaum's grandfather endured just these circumstances. “When my grandfather's health began to fail he took to staying in his hotel room, forced to keep his swollen legs raised, often missing his daily pinochle game,” remembers Scheinbaum. “I thought that his reclusiveness was the result of embarrassment. It was not. If the the management of the hotel discovered that his health was failing, he would be asked to leave. So, Grandpa, like many others, spent much of his time in his room, the prospect of a nursing home looming in his future.”⁸⁵⁴

Such fear is understandable. Nursing homes are often correctly described as warehouses for the elderly – institutions separated from the rest of society so that the young and healthy need not confront physical decline. Many Miami nursing homes fit this description.⁸⁵⁵ Despite nursing homes' abysmal public image, however, the Jewish community increasingly relied on this form of long-term care throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century. Although numerous studies revealed that older Jews spent more time with their children and grandchildren than other ethno-religious groups, they were also more likely to enter a nursing home. A long history of later marriages and lower fertility rates meant that the Jewish-American community was aging faster than the general population,

853. Quote from: Jeffrey Solomon, “Innovative Outreach Approaches in Services to the Elderly,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* (No. 4, 1980), 345. See also: “News of Our Agencies,” *Federation*, June 1979; “Douglas Gardens: A Community in Itself,” *Jewish Floridian*, Aug. 28, 1981.

854. Scheinbaum, *Miami Beach*, xii. See also: Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 249-250.

855. See “Retired Dreams,” a subsection of Chapter Two.

with the greatest growth occurring among the oldest old -- those most in need of extensive care. Jews also lived longer than other groups of Americans, perhaps because they enjoyed higher socio-economic status and sought medical attention more frequently than the overall population.⁸⁵⁶ Scholars have further suggested that American Jews developed a respect and preference for professional service. Many believed that geriatric experts could provide better assistance to frail seniors than inexperienced family members.⁸⁵⁷ For these reasons, Jewish communities remained emotionally and financially committed to professional elder care and Jewish nursing homes offered innovative geriatrics services and developed on-going governmental partnerships. These institutions were among the first to offer physical and occupational therapy, senior day-care services, and the “continuing care” campus.⁸⁵⁸

The Miami Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged at Douglas Gardens helped to develop these and many other innovative programs. Founded in 1945, the home was soon recognized internationally as a leader in geriatric care.⁸⁵⁹ The community took great pride in the home which was one of Dade County's few high-quality long-term care institutions. Jewish organizations, politicians, and volunteers lavished special attention on its residents

856. Uziel Schmelz and Sergio Dellapergola, *Basic Trends in American Jewish Demography* (NY: American Jewish Committee, 1988), iv, 10, 24; Harel, “Jewish Aged: Diversity in Need,” 146; Rosen, “How the Jewish Elderly Differ;” Andrew Cherlin and Carin Celebuski, “Are Jewish Families Different? Some Evidence from the General Social Survey,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Nov. 1983), 907-908.

857. Steve Folmar, “A Higher Purpose: Jewish Tradition and Model Long-Term Care in Cleveland,” in Barresi and Stull, eds, *Ethnic Elderly and Long-Term Care*, 191; Rosen, “How the Jewish Elderly Differ;” Jerome Kaplan and Herbert Shore, “The Jewish Nursing Home: Innovations in Practice and Policy” in Barresi and Stull, eds, *Ethnic Elderly and Long-Term Care*, 123-126; Harel, “Jewish Aged: Diversity in Need,” in Olson, ed., *Age Through Ethnic Lenses*, 152-3.

858. Harel, “Jewish Aged: Diversity in Need,” 155-6; “National Association of Jewish Homes for the Aged,” *Concurrents* (Autumn 1974), 3-4; “Douglas Gardens: 'A Community in Itself'.”

859. “Senate Group Visits Aged Home,” *Jewish Floridian*, Dec. 11, 1959; “Enlarged Home Boasts 216 Beds; Biggest Geriatric Center in Southeast,” *Jewish Floridian*, Dec. 20, 1963; “Home for the Aged Here Becoming Geriatric Center for Professional Studies,” *Jewish Floridian*, Dec. 20, 1963; “Douglas Gardens: 'A Community in Itself'.”

and programs. Stories about Douglas Gardens filled the pages of the *Jewish Floridian* and the *Miami Jewish Federation* newsletter. Volunteer opportunities, special events, and fund-raising initiatives brought residents and community members together on a regular basis.⁸⁶⁰

Residents were encouraged to remain equal partners in these relationships. A residents' council made decisions about the home's operation.⁸⁶¹ "There is a rough yardstick by which to measure [the success of the home]" explained Building Committee member David Fleeman. "[That is] the degree of citizenship participation and responsibility which the residents assume in their Douglas Gardens community." True to this vision, residents reviewed architectural plans and made suggestions as the campus expanded rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁶² Residents also attended conferences on aging and met with political leaders and scholars interested in improving the welfare of older people.⁸⁶³ The home developed partnerships with numerous local and national institutions including the University

860. Articles about Douglas Gardens appeared in nearly every issue of the *Jewish Floridian*. A small selection of articles includes: "Report from Jewish Home for the Aged," *Jewish Floridian*, Oct. 2, 1953; "Reception Coffee' to Honor Volunteer Workers at Jewish Home for Aged," *Jewish Floridian*, May 22, 1959; "Home Residents Slate Service," *Jewish Floridian*, Oct 9, 1959; "Home for Aged Launches First Day Care Program for Dade County's Sr. Citizens," *Jewish Floridian*, March 18, 1960; "Home Residents Prepare Seder," *Jewish Floridian*, April 9, 1960; "Home Oldsters Mark Chanuka," *Jewish Floridian*, Dec 16, 1960; "Home Residents to Mark Purim," *Jewish Floridian*, Feb 24, 1961; "Aged Home Studies Proposed Apartment Project," *Jewish Floridian*, April 14, 1961; "Home for the Aged Women's Auxiliary," *Jewish Floridian*, Sept 8, 1961; "Home Auxiliary a Towering Contribution," *Jewish Floridian*, Sept 28, 1962; "Exciting New Facilities Will Add Two Floors and 120 Beds to Home," *Jewish Floridian*, Nov 30, 1962; "Home for the Aged Here Becoming Geriatric Center for Professional Studies," *Jewish Floridian*, Dec 20, 1963; "Enlarged Home Boasts 216 Beds; Biggest Geriatric Center in Southeast," *Jewish Floridian*, Dec 20, 1963; "Women's Role at the Home for the Aged," *Jewish Floridian*, Sept 4, 1964.

861. "Home Residents Set Installation", *Jewish Floridian*, Feb 28, 1960; "Aged Home Residents Install Officers," *Jewish Floridian*, March 10, 1967.

862. David Fleeman, "More Than Brick, Mortar Have Wrought the Home," *Jewish Floridian*, April 3, 1959.

863. "Senate Group Visits Aged Home," *Jewish Floridian*, Dec 11, 1959; "Senior Citizens Urged to Take Firm Stand on Their Many Needs Today," *Jewish Floridian*, May 27, 1960; "Lecture Series for Sr. Citizens," *Jewish Floridian*, Feb 24, 1961; "Home for Aged Meeting Slates Sen. Smathers," *Jewish Floridian*, April 28, 1961; "Cohen Talks with Senior Citizens," *Jewish Floridian*, June 2, 1961; "Fine to Address Senior Citizens," *Jewish Floridian*, June 9, 1961; "Sen Pepper Talks to Senior Citizens," *Jewish Floridian*, May 10, 1963; "Senior Citizens Air Views at Center Workshop Sessions," *Jewish Floridian*, May 24, 1963; "Reform Leader Pepper to Speak," *Jewish Floridian*, April 22, 1966.

of Miami Medical School, Miami's Jewish Vocational Services, the School of Social Welfare at Florida State University, and the National Council of Jewish Women. These programs provided further exchange between residents and the wider world.⁸⁶⁴

Many of Douglas Garden's collaborative projects received federal funding. While Jewish nursing homes, senior centers, and other programs for the aged benefited enormously from this assistance, governmental partnerships came at a cost. Some worried that federal requirements challenged the resiliency of these services' Jewish character.⁸⁶⁵ “The sacrosanct principle that all public funds must be used without regard to race, color, or creed, inevitably destroys the thrust of any program that may deal with particularized Jewish needs,” argued the *Jewish Observer*.⁸⁶⁶ In 1967 Label Katz, former international president of B'nai B'rith created considerable controversy when he declared that Jewish Community Centers should remain steadfastly sectarian and defended the exclusion of non-Jewish families from a center in New Orleans. The National Jewish Welfare Board, which depended on government support for its many and expanding programs quickly distanced itself from this position. The board argued that the participation of gentiles would “not deter or adversely affect” the unique Jewish qualities of the program.⁸⁶⁷

864. “The JVS- Home Agreement,” *Jewish Floridian*, March 20, 1959; “Jewish Vocational Service Signs Cooperative Agreement with Aged Home,” *Jewish Floridian*, March 20, 1959; “Sidelight Observations On Advances at Home,” *Jewish Floridian*, April 3, 1959; “Training Institute Held Here,” *Jewish Floridian*, Oct. 21, 1960; “Aged Home Strives for Self Improvement,” *Jewish Floridian*, Sept 23, 1960; “A Rewarding Year at the Aged Home,” *Jewish Floridian*, Sept. 8, 1961; “Home Becomes Training Center for Investigation in Geriatrics Research,” *Jewish Floridian*, Jan. 29, 1965.

865. Harel, “Jewish Aged: Diversity in Need,” 157.

866. Bernard Weinberger, “A Room for the Maid ... But Not for Mother: The Orthodox Jewish Widow Slips Through the Net of Government Aid to the Aged,” *Jewish Observer* (February, 1969), 19.

867. “Katz Says 'Y' Centers Should be Sectarian”, *Jewish Floridian*, Feb 17, 1967. For additional discussions about the consequences of Jewish organizational cooperation with federally-funded social outreach programs, see: Robert Morris, “Enlarging Choices for the Aged: The Role of the Federal Government and Service Agencies,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Services* (June 1965), 73, 79-80; Boris Smolar, “Just How Jewish are Jewish Vocational Services in the U.S.?”, *Jewish Floridian*, Jan. 22, 1965; “Social Work Confab Eyes Great

Douglas Gardens welcomed applications from any elderly resident of Dade or South Broward Counties but worked hard to balance its non-sectarian admissions policy with rich Jewish cultural programming.⁸⁶⁸ Residents enjoyed Purim parties, celebrated Hanukkah, and conducted Seders and Yom Kippur services. The home included a Kosher kitchen and an Orthodox synagogue. It offered Hebrew classes, held traditional folk dances, and organized fund-raisers in support of Israel.⁸⁶⁹ A 1963 survey of Jewish homes for the aged revealed a similar commitment to cultural programming in other institutions across the country. Jewish residents benefited from homes that embraced their religion and traditions. It eased the transition from the community to the nursing home, fostered the preservation of personal identity, and encouraged residential sociability.⁸⁷⁰ In *Number Our Days*, Barbara Myerhoff highlights the importance of such cultural connection and continuity in long-term care, particularly for ethnic elders. When Aliyah Center member Basha grew too weak to live independently, she decided to move into a nursing. In discussing this choice with her friends, the elderly woman reflected: “If no one speaks Yiddish, I don't know how I'll manage. Somehow, no matter how bad things are, when I hear Yiddish, something in me goes free,

Society,” *Jewish Floridian*, May 20, 1966.

868. “Douglas Gardens: 'A Community in Itself'”

869. “Home Residents Slate Service,” *Jewish Floridian*, Oct. 9, 1959; “Home Residents Prepare Seder,” *Jewish Floridian*, April 9, 1960; “Home Oldsters Mark Chanuka,” *Jewish Floridian*, Dec. 16, 1960; “Home Residents to Mark Purim,” *Jewish Floridian*, Feb. 24, 1961; “Learning, Growing at the Jewish Home for the Aged,” *Federation* [Greater Miami Jewish Federation Newsletter], March 1973.

870. “Latest Trends in Homes for the Aged,” *Jewish Floridian*, Sept. 13, 1963. For more on the importance of ethnic group participation and cultural traditions and rituals in the lives of the aged, especially those in institutions, see: Kahana, et. al., “Adaptation to Institutional Life,” 144-47, 155-56; Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*, 108- 110, 253; J.B. Kessler, “Aging in Different Ways,” *Human Behavior*, Vol. 5 (June, 1976), 56-59; Carol Woehrer, “The Influence of Ethnic Families on Intergenerational Relationships and Later Life Transitions,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 464 (Nov., 1982), 75; Rosen, “How the Jewish Elderly Differ.”

and everything changes around. Without this I think I would just dry up.”⁸⁷¹

Eating Ripe Grapes and Drinking Old Wine: Reevaluating the Impact of Ethnicity on the Aging Process

The fellowship which flourished in South Florida neighborhoods, retirement communities, and nursing homes provided older Jewish migrants with a strong sense of community – an important ingredient for a satisfying life at any age. Camaraderie among friends and neighbors created informal support networks that mitigated a growing generational divide which sometimes left Jewish retirees feeling isolated from their children and their temples. A strong Jewish tradition of communal responsibility also bolstered retirees. Elderly Jewish women in particular drew on a life-long commitment to outreach and organization. Activism had helped them to maintain and improve their families and communities in the past and they continued this tradition when they moved South. Many founded and actively participated in the Jewish organizations which proliferated in South Florida. Others, worn down by age, poverty, and ailment benefited from the services these organizations provided.

Gerontologists often focus on the challenges of ethnicity on the aging process. After all, minority status combined with linguistic and cultural barriers may prevent ethnic elders from receiving much needed assistance. An examination of the Jewish retirement community of South Florida, however, also reveals the many benefits of a strong ethno-religious identity and culture in later life. In fact, many members of the Miami Jewish community worried that Americanization rather than ethnicity would undermine the security and respect afforded to their oldest citizens. A quote by Dr. Edward Steiglitz, featured prominently in a 1959 edition of the *Jewish Floridian* provides a biting commentary about aging in an American society

871. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*, 253.

that focuses so much on young people while ignoring the many gifts that old age and experience provide. “It is clearly recognized, though often ignored,” wrote Steiglitz, “that the respect which a social group holds for age increases in direct proportion to the maturity of the culture ... It is an amusing absurdity that the symbol of the youngest of the major nations of the world should be a white haired and whiskered old man, Uncle Sam ... Much more fitting would be a figure such as Buster Brown, symbolic of curiosity ... impetuousness ... and self-assurance verging on arrogance.”⁸⁷² At the dawn of a new century it is high time for our country of immigrants to draw on the traditions of its diverse ethnic past. In a society that is rapidly growing older, we should learn from the Jewish proverb the benefits of eating ripe grapes and drinking old wine.

872. “Our Respect for the Aged,” *Jewish Floridian*, April 3, 1959.



Illustration 32: Miami Beach retirees meet at Wolfie's for food and fellowship.⁸⁷³

Illustration 33: Miami Beach mayor meets with local Emma Lazarus Club members to proclaim it “Emma Lazarus Day” in the city, 1969.⁸⁷⁴



873. Scheinbaum, *Miami Beach: Photographs of an American Dream*, 60.

874. Photograph from American Jewish Archives, Mss. Col. 583, Box 22, Folder 6.



Illustration 34: This 1959 cartoon in the *Jewish Floridian* reflects the community's growing post-war anxiety about the future of American Judaism.⁸⁷⁵

875. *Jewish Floridian*, April 10, 1959.



Illustration 35: This 1959 *Jewish Floridian* cartoon highlights the perceived generation gap separating young Jews from their grandparents' generation.⁸⁷⁶

876. A 'Yahsiva' is a Jewish theological college. *Jewish Floridian*, Sept. 18, 1959.



Illustration 36: South Beach seniors en route to a Free Lunch Program⁸⁷⁷



Illustration 37: A sign warns shoppers to “Beware of the Kleptomania Disease.”⁸⁷⁸

877. Scheinbaum, *Miami Beach*, 19.

878. *Ibid.*, 53.

EPILOGUE

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN: BABY BOOMERS AND THE HISTORY OF OLD AGE AND RETIREMENT

As I complete this manuscript, my grandparents race towards their ninetieth birthdays. My grandfather makes plans for long-term care while my grandmother recovers from an operation. My parents keep in touch with my grandparents by phone and book trips to Florida to provide comfort and assistance. They also contemplate the next phase of their own lives. Last year they celebrated their sixtieth birthdays. This year they welcomed their first grandchild into the world. They watch their friends retire. They look in the mirror and note the march of time.

A half century ago sociologist Clark Tibbitts described retirement as a “new phenomenon in our society and the challenge of a new way of life for most Americans.”⁸⁷⁹ Today, as my parents and seventy-eight million other baby boomers⁸⁸⁰ grow older, the graying of the American population is again in the national spotlight. Baby boomers comprise more than a quarter of the population and their impending retirement has politicians and policymakers scrambling. A Presidential Commission tackles the fiscal future of Social Security. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the AFL-CIO promote flexible scheduling and family leave benefits for mature workers. The National Housing

879. Clark Tibbitts, “Retirement Problems in American Society,” *American Journal of Sociology* (January 1954), 301.

880. “Baby boomers” is a term that refers to the cohort of Americans born between 1946 and 1964.

Trust campaigns for affordable senior housing. The Department of Health and Human Services surveys nursing homes and offers recommendations for improving long-term care. Even prison operators grapple with aging policy as an elderly inmate population requires extra medical and nursing assistance.⁸⁸¹

One contingent of analysts concerned by these challenges predicts a devastating social and financial crisis. Paul Hodge, director of Harvard University's Global Generations Policy Initiative, warns: "We have a tremendous demographic tsunami descending on us, and we have to start preparing now." Sylvester Schieber, member of the Commission of Global Aging, describes these demographic changes as the benchmark of a dangerous "social transformation—even a revolution—with few parallels in humanity's past." Experts within the Bush administration offer similarly dire predictions.⁸⁸²

Yet many aging Americans stand defiant in the face of such bleak analysis. A spate of books and articles written by and about older adults celebrates "modern maturity" as an opportunity to redefine the meaning of old age. "The boomers, who have been at the forefront of social change...will be different from current generations of older people," predicts the AARP. "Getting older will never be the same," echoes the *Wall Street Journal*. "Boomers will not accept old notions of later life...they will refuse to...be taken out

881. Richard Stevenson, "Social Security Panel Faces Challenges," *New York Times*, May 3, 2001; Amy Goldstein, "Commission on Social Security Can't Agree," *Washington Post*, Nov. 11, 2001; Tom Hester, "Groups Push Paid Family-Leave Legislation," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 20, 2007; For National Housing Trust efforts to secure affordable senior housing, see www.nhtinc.org; Robert Pear, "Oversight of Nursing Homes is Criticized," *New York Times*, April 22, 2007; Fox Butterfield, "Despite Drop in Crime, An Increase in Inmates," *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 2004; R.V. Rikard and Ed Rosenberg, "Aging Inmate: A Convergence of Trends in the American Criminal Justice System," *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2007), 150-162.

882. Stephen Dinan and Amy Fagan, "America's Starting to Look a lot Older," *Washington Times*, Dec. 26, 2005; Sylvester Schieber, "The Global Aging Crisis," *Electric Perspectives*, Sept/Oct. 2000. See also: Peter Peterson, *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America – and the World* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

of...circulation,” writes Marc Freedman, author of the best-selling *Prime Time: How Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America*. Freedman repudiates claims that these aging Americans spell disaster for the country's health and welfare systems. After all, they will enjoy better health, wealth, and education than previous generations of retirees. They will reinvent themselves through second careers, volunteer work, and activism.⁸⁸³

Wall street advertisers also offer a revolutionary vision of later life. The pharmaceutical, cosmetics, travel, and retirement planning industries all insist that – with the help of their products and services – aging baby boomers will little resemble their parents' generation. A series of television ad campaigns by Ameriprise Financial feature Dennis Hopper, the actor from *Easy Rider* and a 1960s anti-establishment icon. In one commercial, Hooper stands on a beautiful beach, holding a dictionary. “To withdraw, to go away, to disappear ... that's how the dictionary defines retirement. Time to redefine!,” he growls as he throws the book onto the sand. “Your generation is definitely not headed for Bingo night. In fact, you could write a book about how you're going to turn retirement upside down ...'cause I just don't see you playing shuffleboard, ya' know what I mean?!!”⁸⁸⁴

Usually overlooked by optimists and pessimists alike is the fact that our ostensibly present-day revolution in aging began not with the baby boomers but with their parents and grandparents in the 1950s. Today, bingo and shuffleboard may be hopelessly out of fashion, but as mid-century retirees gathered in parks and senior centers to pursue these pastimes, they remade the meaning of old age in America. For the first time, older Americans were retiring en masse, many with enough savings and pension benefits to anticipate an

883. Kelly Greene, “When We're All 64,” *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 26, 2005; Marc Freedman, *Prime Time: How Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), 24.

884. This Ameriprise ad campaign ran regularly in prime-time television spots throughout 2006 and 2007.

independent old age that would likely have been impossible for their parents and grandparents. Since the Second World War, moreover, Americans have enjoyed progressively longer, healthier “golden years.” Prolonged life produced a painful irony, however. While more and more seniors reached their eightieth birthdays and beyond, they also suffered from chronic disease and disability. Long-term care emerged as a critical challenge for individual elders, their families, and their communities.

Today, as media reports and pundits focus increased attention on our rapidly aging population, this history carries particular contemporary relevance. Rather than rejecting previous generations of elders as outmoded, modern-day seniors and policymakers can improve the future of old age by learning from the past. While baby boomers' substantial numbers will dramatically increase the proportion of older people in our midst, our society has been growing grayer over the past fifty years. Contemporary seniors have inherited a number of advantages and problems from their elders. They also have inherited the many gifts of age. A history of old age as seen through the eyes of older men and women themselves reveals that, contrary to popular opinion, seniors are resilient and resourceful. Mid-century retirees were dynamic and flexible members of their families and communities – qualities of later life that have for too long been overlooked. As my parents and their cohort embark on their own journey into later life, they follow in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents – the original retirement pioneers.

Older Americans have enjoyed steady gains in health and longevity over the past century thanks to better medical treatments, living conditions, and nutrition. Today, an increased focus on preventive care, improvements in drug therapies, and better medical technologies continue to provide older Americans with an expanding number of energy-filled

years. Older Americans' own assessment of their overall health marks these improvements. In a 1974 survey conducted by the National Council on Aging, fifty-four percent of sixty-five year olds described their health as "poor." By 2000 only forty-two percent of sixty-five year-old respondents felt this way.⁸⁸⁵

Economic conditions have also improved dramatically for older Americans, due in large part to the creation and expansion of Social Security and the implementation of Medicare and Medicaid. In the 1930s approximately fifty percent of seniors lived in poverty. By the late 1970s, that figure dropped to roughly fourteen percent.⁸⁸⁶ Today about ten percent of older people live in poverty – nearly the same percentage as adults between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four.⁸⁸⁷

Yet financial uncertainty fuels a growing anxiety among older workers. Many postwar retirees could rely on clearly defined, lifetime annuities as part of their traditional pension plans. A majority of contemporary retirement packages, by contrast, are tied to stock-market investments which are inherently prone to fluctuation.⁸⁸⁸ Postwar elders, moreover, received dependable Social Security checks that by the mid-1970s were adjusted to inflation. Today's experts predict that without drastic reforms, the Social Security trust fund will be depleted by

885. W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Older Americans, Vital Communities: A Bold Vision for Societal Aging* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 5-6.

886. W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 143-144; W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Shades of Gray: Old Age, American Values, and Federal Policy Since 1920* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1983), 120.

887. National Caucus and Center on the Black Aged, "How Aging Black America Lives," 4.

888. Nelson Aldrich Jr., "Out of Retirement: Nothing Like a Drop in 401(k) Values to Make You Rethink Your Feelings About Work," *New York Times*, Aug. 5, 2001; Paul Lim, "Birthday Bash: Boomers are About to Find Out Whether Their 401(k)'s are Such a Sweet Deal," *U.S. News and World Report*, Jan. 16, 2006; Paul Lim, "The Big Squeeze: The Pressure is on Baby Boomers Saving for Retirement," *U.S. News and World Report*, March 24, 2006; Richard Johnson, "Should People Work Longer, and Will They?," *Fact Sheets on Population Aging* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, Dec. 2007); MetLife Mature Market Institute, *The MetLife Survey of American Attitudes Toward Retirement: What's Changed* (Westport, CT: MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2005).

2041. As a result, many Americans worry that Social Security will cover but a fraction of the income necessary to sustain them comfortably in retirement.⁸⁸⁹ Numerous media headlines and research reports also warn that boomers spend more readily than their parents' generation did and that, as a result, they will enter retirement with smaller savings and bigger debts.⁸⁹⁰ Finally, while Americans expect to enjoy even longer and healthier later lives than their predecessors, they face the prospect of supporting themselves through extended periods of chronic illness at the end of life. Recent surveys conducted by financial service firms Merrill Lynch and UBS report that the unpredictable costs of long-term care and inadequate health care coverage top older workers' concerns about retirement.⁸⁹¹

These financial insecurities are encouraging older workers to buck long-term retirement trends. Throughout the twentieth century, older Americans' health and wealth increased while their labor market participation decreased. Social Security, private pensions, and age discrimination sparked the growth of mass retirement among postwar seniors. Forced-retirement left these men and women with little choice but to exit the workforce, yet many embraced retirement as a period of well-deserved leisure. In fact, the proportion of older workers retiring from the labor market rose steadily even after the implementation of anti-age discrimination laws provided more opportunities to stay on the job. Increasing percentages of employees also opted for early retirement.⁸⁹² Today, however, the labor force

889. Lim, "The Big Squeeze"; Urban Institute's "Retirement Policy" overview. See: www.urban.org/toolkit/issues/retirementproject/index.cfm.

890. See for example: Lim, "Birthday Bash"; Susan Tompor, "Boomer Generation May Go Bust When it Comes Time to Retire," *Seattle Times*, Feb. 22, 2005; Fred Brock, "A Soft Landing for the Boomers?," *New York Times*, July 13, 2003; Hubert Herring, "Bulletin Board: More Bumps in the Road to Retirement," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 2003; Teresa Sullivan, Elizabeth Warren, and J. Lawrence Westbrook, *The Fragile Middle-Class: Americans in Debt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

891. See: www.agewave.com/research/landmark_retirementSurvey.php; Tompor, "Boomer Generation May go Bust."

892. Johnson, "Should People Work Longer, and Will They?"; Achenbaum, *Older Americans*, *Vital*

participation rates for older workers are increasing and surveys reveal that baby boomers plan to continue working well into their sixties. The traditional pattern of moving from full-time employment to full-time retirement is also less common. Many older men and women now choose to take part-time positions or to work on contract rather than removing themselves from the labor market completely. Others change career paths in later life.⁸⁹³ This trend towards delayed retirement offers important societal and individual advantages including increased tax revenue, economic growth, and more financial security for older adults after they leave the workforce. The Congressional Budget Office notes that for every year workers past the age of sixty-two postpone retirement, they reduce their need for retirement savings by five percent, increase their Social Security benefits by several percent, and gain more time to grow private pension funds and personal savings accounts.⁸⁹⁴

While a growing percentage of all older workers expect to remain in the labor force full-time past the age of sixty-five, substantially fewer black employees indicate that they have made such plans.⁸⁹⁵ This may seem surprising given the fact that African Americans continue to enter old age with fewer financial assets than white Americans.⁸⁹⁶ Experts suggest

Communities, 8-9.

893. John Gallagher, "Retirement of Baby Boomers May Reverberate in Workplace," *Seattle Times*, Feb. 22, 2005; Johnson, "Should People Work Longer?"; www.agewave.com/research/landmark_retirementSurvey.php

894. Congressional Budget Office, "The Retirement Prospects of the Baby Boomers," *Economic and Budget Issue Brief*, March 18, 2004. See also: Johnson, "Should People Work Longer, and Will They?";

895. Research by the Urban Institute indicates that 27.9 percent of black workers aged fifty-one to fifty-six planned on remaining in the workforce full-time after the age of sixty-five, compared with 33.3 percent of all other workers in the same age group. Dan Murphy, Richard Johnson, Gordon Mermin, "Racial Differences in Baby Boomers' Retirement Expectations," *Older Americans' Economic Security*, No. 13 (May 2007).

896. One recent survey reveals, for example, that the median white household, in which one member was between the ages of fifty-one and fifty-six, has more than seven times the net worth of its black counterpart (\$200,000 vs. \$27,000). Annamaria Lusardi and Olivia Mitchell, "Baby Boomer Retirement Security: The Roles of Planning, Financial Literacy, and Household Wealth," University of Michigan Retirement Research Center, Working Paper, April 2006, 19. See: www.mrrc.isr.umich.edu

a number of reasons for this discrepancy. They note that blacks report lower levels of job satisfaction, and suffer more health-related work limitations and higher rates of labor force discrimination than white Americans. These findings vividly illustrate how the educational and occupational discrimination which restricted many African Americans to low-wage jobs and hindered their career advancement and retirement savings throughout adulthood, continue to limit their options in later life.⁸⁹⁷

Although all older Americans have enjoyed steady economic gains since the mid-twentieth-century, great racial inequality still exists. Today, nearly a quarter of older African Americans live in poverty – more than double the rate of white seniors.⁸⁹⁸ Racial differences in the older Americans' health and health care also persist. In the mid-twentieth-century, a lifetime of unequal access to medical treatment and preventative services, as well as greater rates of underemployment and poverty among African Americans meant that blacks entered mid-life in poorer health than their white counterparts. In 1970, the life expectancy for African Americans lagged nearly five years behind that of white Americans, at just over sixty-nine years of age. Middle-aged and elderly blacks were more likely than whites to die from cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and influenza.⁸⁹⁹ Today older blacks continue to suffer from higher rates of these conditions and a gap in life expectancy remains. The

897. Murphy, et al., "Racial Differences in Baby Boomers' Retirement Expectations."

898. National Caucus and Center on the Black Aged, "How Aging Black America Lives," (Washington, D.C.: NCCBA, 2005), 4.

899. Kyriakos Markides and Charles Mindel, *Aging and Ethnicity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 64-5; Nancy Cope and Howard Hall, "Risk Factors Associated with the Health Status of Black Women in the United States," in Woodrow Jones, Jr., and Mitchell Rice, eds., *Health Care Issues in Black America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 44-56; Antonio Rene, "Racial Differences in Mortality: Blacks and Whites," in Jones, Jr., and Rice, eds., *Health Care Issues in Black America*, 31-41; Robert Joseph Taylor and Willie Taylor, "The Social and Economic Status of the Black Elderly," *Phylon*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (4th Qtr., 1982), 295-306; Jacquelyn Johnson Jackson, "Marital Life Among Aging Blacks," *The Family Coordinator*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan. 1972), 27; Ronald Angel and Jacquelyn Angel, *Who Will Care for Us?: Aging and Long-Term Care in Multicultural America* (NY: NY University Press, 1997), 23-24, 40, 44-45.

average life span is seventy-three for black Americans and seventy-eight for whites.⁹⁰⁰

Older Americans' health, wealth, and retirement rates have changed dramatically over the past half century. So too have their community roles and interpersonal relationships. Persistent stereotypes depict older people – particularly Florida-bound retirees – as superfluous citizens who surrender purpose-driven lives to golf greens, park benches, and shuffleboard courts. Baby boomers and the books, magazines, and advertisements that cater to them, reinforce these images of post-war seniors while insisting that the generation that pushed boundaries in its youth – through rock 'n roll, the sexual revolution, and student activism - will similarly transform later life. In *Prime Time*, for example, Marc Freedman sounds the call for greater social activism among aging boomers. In his rush to convince readers of the benefits of community outreach, however, Freedman too easily dismisses post-war retirees as disengaged and self-indulgent. Today's older adults “are not likely to be content with thirty years of shuffleboard and a tract house in the sunshine,” he insists. “Though they won't be adverse to taking it easy ... they will also insist on contributing ... [They will] redefine retirement in a way that can take us past the 'golden years.’”⁹⁰¹

It is true that mass retirement segregated growing numbers of seniors from the larger society. Yet a closer examination of the “golden years” reveals that post-war retirement was decidedly more complex than Freedman and other commentators would have us believe. Far from settling into a stagnant and uneventful period of life, older adults grappled with considerable social and psychological adjustments that had important implications for their communal and familial relationships. While many retirees may have anticipated long years of

900. Linda Wray, “Cross-Cultural Medicine: A Decade Later,” *Western Journal of Medicine* (Sept. 1992), 358; Steven Reinberg, “Gap in Black-White Life Expectancy Narrows,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2007.

901. Freedman, *Prime Time*, 69, 72-73. Quote on page 73.

easy-living, moreover, inflation, poor health, and the skyrocketing costs of long-term care eventually dashed such expectations for all but the wealthiest of seniors.

The retirement villages, condominiums, and trailer parks that mushroomed across Florida and the rest of the United States throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century appeared deceptively subdued. Along with the increasingly popular senior center, these age-segregated environments created fertile space for an age-based group-consciousness and culture to develop. When retirees grew older and savings dwindled, when they could no longer afford their medications, and when they faced the challenge of providing care for an ailing spouse, seniors took action. They entered voting booths, congregated at town-hall meetings and government hearings, and wrote to their representatives in droves. They rallied for increased Social Security benefits, better health care coverage, and safe and sanitary housing. Retirees also provided vital community assistance through formal and informal forms of outreach. They checked in on home-bound neighbors, supported friends who had recently lost a spouse, and volunteered in senior centers, nursing homes, and hospitals.

Retirees also redefined their multi-generational relationships and obligations. Unprecedented post-war wealth enabled growing numbers of older Americans and their offspring to lead independent lives inside separate, single-family homes. Geographic mobility further altered family ties. As increasing numbers of retirees and young people relocated across the country, airport reunions and long-distance telephone calls often replaced the multi-generational household long celebrated in the American imagination. Yet, for all these changes, intergenerational bonds endured and even flourished. Older people treasured their new personal space and freedoms, but they also characterized their family relationships as strong and fulfilling. Increased longevity and better health provided postwar

seniors with the opportunity to create relationships with grandchildren that spanned decades. Smaller numbers of children and grandchildren, meanwhile, meant that older adults could devote special attention to each family member and offer valuable assistance in times of need. Grandmothers and grandfathers looked after children when mothers returned to the workforce, provided emotional support to parents and children when marriages fell apart, received step-grandchildren with open arms, and offered financial assistance to family members enduring economic hardship.

As baby boomers grow older, they too will remain vital members of their families and communities.⁹⁰² They can draw on own cohort's rich history of challenging the social system and pushing cultural boundaries. But they can also build on the important - if long overlooked - creativity and activism of previous generations of retirees. Postwar seniors challenged age-based stereotypes, worked to dismantle mandatory retirement, and helped to improve older American's financial security by demanding increases in Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits. Baby boomers enter old age in better health and with more wealth thanks, in part, to their parents' efforts.

Baby boomers may also be surprised to learn that they have inherited the pleasures of mature sexuality from their parents' generation. While Freedman depicts postwar seniors as engaged in leisure-time pursuits to the exclusion of important community commitments, other commentators insist that a benighted prudishness limited retirees' recreational activities to the golf green and shuffleboard court. "Half a century ago, there were certainly exceptional fifty-year-old women who had lovers, and married people in their sixties and seventies who still enjoyed each other sexually. But it wasn't the norm," notes Gail Sheehy,

902. Andrew Achenbaum notes the prevalence of volunteer work among modern day seniors. Adults over the age of fifty-five contribute more time than other age-groups to social service and community-based projects. See: Achenbaum, *Older Americans, Vital Communities*, 65-72.

the best-selling author of *Sex and the Seasoned Woman*.⁹⁰³

At first glance, it is easy to see why commentators such as Sheehy believe that senior sexuality has undergone a sea change from a generation ago. Unlike in years past, the marketing truism that “sex sells” is now applied to adults across the life span. Advertisements for Viagra and Lavitra promise older couples nights of endless passion, a denture commercial depicts a silver-haired couple locked in a passionate kiss, and cruise ship promotions celebrate later-life romance as glamorous and exciting. The film industry is also starting to embrace love in the later years. A comparison of three films about mature female sexuality and the May-December relationship, provides just one example. In the 1967 motion-picture, *The Graduate*, Ann Bancroft played a forty-something seductress whose affair with a young man was vilified both on screen and off. A disgusted public demanded that movie posters featuring a scene of the older woman in bed with her “total victim” be removed from the New York subway system.⁹⁰⁴ Two more recent movies offer a different perspective of aging women's sexuality. In the 1990 film, *White Palace*, a warm if eccentric relationship blossoms between actress Susan Sarandon and her much younger co-star. Audiences of the 2003 blockbuster *Something's Gotta Give* cheered baby boomer Diane Keaton's on-screen romances with two men from different generations: the thirty-something Keanu Reeves and the sixty-something Jack Nicholson.⁹⁰⁵

903. Gail Sheehy, *Sex and the Seasoned Woman* (New York: Random House, 2006). See also: Joan Price, *Better Than I Ever Expected: Straight Talk About Sex After Sixty* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006); Katherine Chaddock and Emilie Chaddock, *Flings, Frolics and Forever Afters: A Single Woman's Guide to Romance After Fifty* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2005); Jane Juska, *A Round-Heeled Woman: My Late Life Adventures in Sex and Romance* (New York: Villard Books, 2003).

904. Robert Kotlowitz, “Capote's Killers and Others,” *Harper's Magazine*, March 1968, 153-156; Andrew Greeley, “Sons and Fathers,” *The Reporter*, Feb. 1968, 38-39; “‘Graduate’ Subway Ad Dropped After Protest,” *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1968.

905. Luis Mandoki, director, *White Palace* (Double Play, 1990); Nancy Meyers, director, *Something's Gotta Give* (MGM, 2003).

Films and advertisements such as these attest to a growing public awareness and acceptance of love in the later years. Yet it is incorrect to assume that postwar seniors suppressed their sensuality simply because cultural stereotypes deemed its expression silly or even abhorrent. In the 1960s and 1970s older men and women participated in their own sexual revolution. Retirees sought more information about sex than ever before, mature couples reinvigorated their love lives after children left home, and unprecedented numbers of singles over sixty sought new mates and engaged in romantic affairs. Until recently, these behaviors received wide-spread criticism and even censor, but today public opinion has begun to catch up with the private practices of older adults.

Mature sexuality is out of the closet, though it is important to note that cultural stereotypes still prevent many Americans from feeling comfortable with their aging bodies. Few films or advertisements feature older actors (particularly female actors) with gray hair, sagging skin, and age spots. Diane Keaton may sizzle in an on-screen kiss with a young Hollywood sex symbol, but she also appears in a L'Oreal ad campaign for an anti-wrinkle cream. Americans are bombarded with advertisements for Botox, anti-aging vitamins, fitness videos, and hair dyes. The message to individuals of all ages is clear: you can be fabulous at forty, fifty, sixty, and beyond, but you must not appear to be older. In other words, the best old age is one that most closely resembles young adulthood.

Baby boomers may postpone retirement, remain active members of families and communities, and stave off the evidence of age with creams and potions, but time and ailment will eventually take their toll. Americans over the age of sixty-five suffer greater rates of disease and disability than other age group. Roughly thirty-percent of these adults need help with personal care and household chores. The “oldest old”(those over the age of

eighty-five) require the most assistance and comprise the fastest growing segment of the senior population. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the elderly in this age group will increase from four million to more than twenty-one million during the next fifty years.⁹⁰⁶

Despite the common misconception that busy modern families have largely abandoned their elders, adult children continue to provide seniors with the bulk of long-term care. The burdens of elder care, moreover, have increased steadily over the past half century along with Americans' longevity. Middle-aged daughters give the most assistance, often while juggling the demands of employment and child care. The government has historically provided little support to these caregivers, a trend that persists today. A handful of recent federal initiatives – including the Family Medical Leave Act (1993) and the National Family Caregiver Support Program (2000) - offer some help and hope. These programs remain woefully underfunded and insufficient in scope, however.⁹⁰⁷

When the emotional, physical, and financial demands of elder care prove too great for families, frail seniors often end up in nursing homes. Since the mid-twentieth century, the nursing home industry has become the mainstay of the government's long-term-care policy. In the 1950s low-interest government loans spurred the construction of privately-owned nursing homes. A decade later, Medicaid and Medicare encouraged the industry's meteoric expansion. These programs paid nursing homes to care for the country's frail aged, while largely excluding home-based alternatives. Postwar legislators believed that the medically-

906. U.S. Census Bureau, "Projected Population of the United States, By Age and Sex: 2000 to 2050," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau. See: www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/natprojtabl02a.pdf
Richard Johnson and Joshua Wiener, "A Profile of Frail Older Americans and their Caregivers," *Retirement Project Occasional Paper No. 8* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2006), see: www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID+311451; Achenbaum, *Older Americans, Vital Communities*, 5, 15.

907. Richard Johnson, "The Burden of Caring for Frail Parents," Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2007; Barbara Presley Noble, "At Work: Interpreting the Family Leave Act," *New York Times*, Aug. 1, 1993; Esther Fein, "Looking Beyond Family to Aid the Elderly," *New York Times*, April 6, 1994; Jane Gross, "As Parents Age, Baby Boomers and Business Struggle to Cope," *New York Times*, March 25, 2006; Amy Joyce, "Caring for Dear Old Dad Get a Little Easier," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2007.

modeled nursing home offered a vast improvement over the assistance rendered in the rapidly growing numbers of dingy and unregulated boarding houses and rest homes. A wave of nation-wide scandals throughout the 1960s and 1970s revealed, however, that nursing homes generally served as nothing more than warehouses for America's oldest old. In the worst facilities, residents endured physical abuse and neglect. Homes were repeatedly cited for unsanitary conditions, the over-medication and restraint of patients, and critically low-levels of nursing staff. Even safe and sanitary facilities were often unpleasant places characterized by impersonal care and highly regimented, institutional environments.⁹⁰⁸

Little has changed over the past forty years, despite ongoing attempts at reform. Inhumane care persists, due in large part to proprietor greed and poor oversight. The multi-billion dollar nursing home industry operates a powerful lobby, which has repeatedly blocked stronger government regulation and deflated federal initiatives for alternative forms of long-term care. It is little wonder that in a recent survey of 3,262 seriously ill hospital patients, thirty-percent said that they would rather die than live permanently in a nursing home. For those who require long-term medical care, however, few other options exist. Today, six percent of older adults and a quarter of America's oldest old reside in nursing homes.⁹⁰⁹

As policy makers consider the future challenges facing our aging society, long-term care deserves their careful attention. A great and growing divide still separates the "oldest old" from the younger cohorts of active seniors now celebrated in ad campaigns and books and articles aimed at baby boomers. Too often our oldest, frailest citizens are left to endure

908. Eric Bates, "No Place Like Home," *Southern Exposure*, Vol. XX, No. 3 (Fall 1992), 16-21; Tinkler Ready, "Resting Uneasy," *Southern Exposure*, Vol. XX, No. 3 (Fall 1992), 22-25; Eric Bates, "The Shame of Our Nursing Homes," *The Nation*, March 29, 1999.

909. Bates, "The Shame of Our Nursing Homes"; Atul Gawande, "Rethinking Old Age," *New York Times*, May 24, 2007; Charles Duhigg, "At Many Homes, More Profit and Less Nursing," *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 2007. Susan Gilbert, "Nursing Home? 'I'd Rather Die,'" *International Herald Tribune*, Aug. 7, 1997

the last of life in poverty and pain. A lifetime of unequal access to education, career opportunities, and medical care also present special challenges to African American and other minority seniors. Black and Hispanic Americans continue to enter later life in poorer health and with smaller savings and pension benefits than the majority of older adults. Future old age policy decisions – especially those that alter the Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid systems - must be made with careful attention to their impact on this group of seniors, who by the year 2025 will compose roughly a quarter of the sixty-five-plus population.

Despite these and other challenges, recent history provides older adults with many reasons to embrace the journey into later life with confidence. Long-held stereotypes about the older people as unattractive, uninteresting, and unimportant are being replaced with more positive portrayals. Today's older Americans, like their parents and grandparents before them, will enter old age in better health and with more wealth than ever before. As they grow older, baby boomers will continue to make important contributions to their families and communities. I hope that their activism will improve our nation's long-term care policies and dramatically alter the experience of old age at the end of life – the final retirement frontier.

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