



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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The Graying of America, 1986.



THE GRAYING OF AMERICA  
Daniel Jeremy Silver  
March 9, 1986

In 1800, one out of every two Americans was 16 years of age or younger, incidentally, a population mix which is almost identical to that of many Third World countries today. By 1900 the ratio had changed to about one in three, 35 percent of the American population was 16 years of age or younger. Today one in five Americans, some 22 percent of the population, is under the age of 17.

Demographers explain this dramatic change in a number of ways. Pride of place goes to the medical advances which, particularly in this century, have ~~radically~~ diminished the incidence of childhood death and dramatically increased life expectancy. Between 1900 and 1985, life expectancy increased by a remarkable 28 years, from 47 years to the present 75 years. Someone who was sixty-five in 1950 could expect to live another 12 years. In 1985 a sixty-five year old could look forward to another 17 years. In 1950, 4 percent of our population was over sixty-five. Today that figure has risen to 8 percent. By the year 2000, it has been estimated that 11 percent of the population will be in these age brackets. <sup>Of course,</sup> Medicine has not been the only force for change. In recent years a falling birth rate has deeply impacted the shape of the population.

America is becoming older, and many wonder whether the graying of America necessarily implies a weakened America. As people age, we lose certain capacities. Can an analogy be drawn between what happens in our private lives and our national life? The answer is no. Measured by our history, Japan is an old country whose sense of nationhood goes back at least a thousand years. Yet, Japan's economic vitality leads us to call her a youthful country.



Egypt, Iran, India and the countries of Latin America have a much younger population mix than we do. Half of their population is under the age of 17. Does this mean that their future is necessarily brighter than ours?

Nations do not age the way people do. This fact has become increasingly clear as nations have become less and less dependent upon the ability of the masses to bear the heavy burdens which a pre-industrial society imposed upon everyone. Today a nation's vitality depends on brains rather than brawn.

The graying of America is in many ways a plus. Mental capacities do not diminish as quickly as physical skills. Most Olympic athletes are beyond their prime by the mid-twenties. Albert Einstein in his 76th year, the year of his death, was still doing important research in physics. Our increased longevity actually allows us to derive benefit from our well-trained human resource for extended periods of time. In most ways, the graying of America is a source of strength rather than of weakness.

Indeed, those who have thought deeply about the graying of America find themselves unexpectedly thinking more about childhood rather than with second childhood. The graying of America heightens our consciousness about the careless way we waste the talents of our youth by allowing them to remain undeveloped. This does not mean that anyone believes we now provide proper or adequate care for the elderly. Not at all. But those who study the matter know that it is a comparatively easy task to conceive programs which would take care of the institutional and emotional needs of the elderly. Here is a case where trained people and money would solve most of these problems. How to train the young and help them to become competent



adults is a much tougher issue. This problem cannot be solved with money and more trained people.

America has not distinguished itself in creating the structures and the environment which would encourage the young to develop their God-given talents. Some schools do well. Many barely teach their graduates to read and write.

One issue that troubles the demographers is that recent census figures reveal that the youngest age cohorts in our society differ in significant ways from older age groups. An increasing proportion of our young are coming from culturally, socially and financially deprived homes. The birth rate of the families who are most able to provide the "advantages" of a stable home, of books, of cultural stimulation, of protection from the street - is below the reproduction rate. A child born today has a life expectancy of nearly eighty years. Without employable skills, without any real sense of himself or herself, semi-literate, that person will be a taker rather than a provider for a long, long period of time. The growing proportion of restless, frustrated young people who face the bleakest of futures cause us concern not only for the unhappiness which they fact but because, as their numbers increase, we must wonder if they may not pose a threat to the social order and our national prosperity.

The teachers we put into our classrooms ought to be among the best and the brightest. The challenge is enormous. Unfortunately, the generation which graduated into our classrooms during the Great Depression, our best and brightest, have gone elsewhere. We have not paid teachers adequately nor offered them the respect which would attract top drawer people. For many years teachers have



been drawn from the bottom quarter of college graduates and teacher education has been one of the least demanding college programs. I recently heard an absolutely frightening statistic: ~~the~~ teachers who are leaving our school systems had a scholastic aptitude average a few points above the national average, but those who are going into classrooms for the first time have SAT averages 110 points below the national average.

For many social, economic and political reasons, the young in our society on average have less skills than their elders. The age cohorts who will be in their thirties, twenty years from now would have fewer high school graduates than those in their thirties today. If you want to be concerned about the future of America, worry less about the graying of America and more about pervasive illiteracy, the carelessness with which we train up our young, the growing percentage of our young who bear the scars of broken homes and have not been provided the emotional encouragement which would help them mature into self-confident human beings.

Students, even those who never miss a day because of illness, are out of school more days than they are in class. When the school day is over, more and more of our children return to homes where there are no parents and little adult supervision or encouragement. Fewer and fewer of our children have some experienced adult to whom they can talk and who can help them think about the complexities of the world they will soon enter. Most everyone acknowledges that the future will be increasingly complex and that the economy will require people of more highly developed skills than heretofore - that a willing spirit and a strong back no longer guarantee employment - yet, we continue to be satisfied with schools which graduate the



unprepared and the unqualified.

In this year of 1986, several decades into the space age and high tech age, teachers in the great state of Texas are in an uproar. Why? This week they must take an examination. What will that examination test? Simple literacy. Can they read? Can they write? Can they spell? Why the uproar? Many know they cannot adequately read, write and spell.

When we focus on the graying of America, it becomes clear that ~~some~~ important changes have taken place. Becoming gray is not what it used to be. The boundaries of age and <sup>some</sup> familiar attitudes <sup>Long</sup> associated with age have begun to disappear. Sociologists have begun to describe a new class of people, the young-old. Who are the young-old? The seventy-year olds who are on the tennis court rather than in wheel chairs. When my grandfather was sixty-five he decided that he could no longer walk out without a cane. He was still straight-backed and spry, but the cane was for him a sign of venerability, a sign of age. He felt himself of age and was determined to be treated accordingly. Many who were raised as I was still find it difficult to call someone a bit older by their first name. My children's generation calls everyone by their first name, and the elderly are no longer affronted by what would have once been considered impertinence.

We tend to feel young and to act young longer than our parents did. To be sure, the young-old are not strangers to bifocals and trifocals, hearing aids, muscle aches and pains and pill bottles; but the last seventy-year old who complained to me about carrying



a cane had broken his leg skiing.

The young-old of this generation enjoy new opportunities and they can offer the nation energy and experience. But the young-old also present certain problems: to themselves and to the nation.

For the nation the problem is that of making place. At some point we have to move over to allow young people their opportunity. You can see this most dramatically in our universities, particularly as enrollments have fallen. If faculty are allowed to remain in their classrooms as long as they are competent to do so, many would continue teaching into their seventies and even eighties. If they continue, what opportunity will a young PhD have? Understandably, many institutions have established an arbitrary retirement age; and, of course, the young-old protest. "I can still do the job." Most can. Some are allowed to continue, but in one way or another the society has to devise systems which will provide opportunity for the next generation. We cannot encourage our children to develop their talents and then indefinitely delay their being able to use their skills.

For the young-old, the problem is how to take full advantage of the gift of leisure and opportunity. Being a young-old today is a challenge. The young-old face a unique opportunity for which past experience provides little guidance and for which society has few enabling structures in place. The problem is one of imagination. The young-old must develop new interests and invent outlets for their talents.

The young-old need a new sense of their stage of life. Most of us are conditioned to think of the young-old period as retirement. Retirement suggests withdrawal from activity and challenge. The



young-old who want these years to be satisfying cannot retire. They have to move out energetically and create a future.

Unfortunately, many do little thinking and make few preparations for this period in their lives. Many seem to approach the young-old stage with the naivete of teenagers who believe that summer camp is the way leisure time is spent. "When I retire, we'll spend the winters in Florida swimming, playing golf and relaxing. We'll come back home over the summer to much the same schedule." That's retirement, a permanent, 12-month-a-year camp. This generation of the young-old lived their so-called "productive" lives through the greatest period of prosperity the world has ever allowed any nation and so many can indulge in this idyll. They have the financial wherewithal to spend the fees which permanent summer camp requires. But it is not to their advantage to do so.

Swimming and golf are not known to be taxing intellectual enterprises. They're fun, but that's another story. So what happens? The mind rusts. Leisure becomes a burden. Time becomes a burden. Experience tells me that the all-year round summer campers age rapidly. They begin to lose a sense of their capacity, to feel diminished.

What to do? Many who are forced to leave a university faculty simply move to another university. That is hardly making place. The State of California developed a program designed to encourage retired professors to teach their particular discipline in secondary schools. The plan met resistance. Not from parents or students but from the teachers' union who claimed these distinguished scholars were taking the place of those who might otherwise be gainfully



employed. The young-old need to break new ground, try new ventures, explore new challenges.

It's not easy. Over the last half century many social services once performed by volunteers have been taken over by professionals. Our society has not been inventive in devising place and space for the young-old. Still, there are many ways that one can take. There are ~~many~~ civic tasks. The political arena cries out for volunteers. I sometimes wonder why many of our best young people take on so many civic responsibilities in their thirties and forties when they do so at the expense of ~~their~~ home and children. It might be wiser to delay some of this involvement and activity until they reach the young-old stage when there is time and family responsibilities need not be slighted. There are ~~always~~ books to be written, children to be tutored, ~~public services to be offered~~, social problems to be addressed, hobbies to be pursued, songs to be sung.

The problem of the graying of America is not simply ~~that~~ the challenge of providing proper custodial and institutional care for the oldest old. Age today is not simply a broken hip and the wheel chair. It is <sup>a</sup> long and challenging period, for some a third of their lives, a period which can be empty or truly fulfilling. The competitive tasks are behind us. For many the problem is not financial security; there is Social Security and Medicare and usually a pension.

Rather, the problem is to plan a new life. What am I going to do, where am I going to do it, and how am I going to go about it, to think through an opportunity for which neither we nor the society has made proper supervision, and act on our plans.



The problem of how to care properly for the oldest old, for those who can no longer care for themselves, cannot be minimized. Buildings must be built. A caring profession must be recruited and trained. Money is crucial, but more is involved. The oldest old drown in loneliness and for many their families are elsewhere. At this stage we pay a stiff penalty for being such a mobile society with such fragmented families. Families try to provide proper care by hiring it, but it is not the same thing. Even when care is available and affordable, the institutions cannot fully satisfy the need. I don't care how well run an institution is, unless there is somebody who cares about the patient there will be times when the patient's needs are not being properly managed. Someone who cares must watch that drugs are given, that the patient is dressed and washed, that there is conversation and love. Family has a crucial role to play providing emotional support and personal attention.

No more tragic problem comes into my office than that of the middle-aged children who tell me: "I want mother to live with me. We have the room. I have time. She won't come. What would happen if something suddenly happened to her at night. She's afraid to open the door of her apartment, but she won't come." When mother comes in she tells me: "I won't be a burden on my children. They don't need an old lady complicating their lives. I don't want to lose my independence." I understand what both are saying, but it is tragic that they cannot come to some understanding.

Parenting is never an easy task. Second childhood, like first childhood, requires a parent. The only difference is that the child is now the parent. There is nothing automatically ennobling about age. Age does not turn parents into saints. Many become more



difficult and cantankerous, certainly more demanding. But then we were naughty when we were children and they put up with us. Our children are our children whatever they do and our parents are our parents whatever they become.

One of the problems, perhaps the problem, which political scientists fear as America becomes grayer is an increasingly bitter competition for tax dollars between the young and the old. They worry that the old will not vote tax monies for year-round quality education and that the young will not vote for the maintenance of adequate levels of Social Security and Medicare or the construction and maintenance of geriatric facilities. I am convinced that there is enough understanding and humanity in our society to provide adequately for both these needs. I am convinced that a society such as ours can provide quality education and quality care. I am also convinced that the aged and their supporters must understand that much can be done but not everything, and that when hard choices must be made, we should lean toward the young.

The New York Times carried a story this week about a woman in New Jersey who had fallen into an irreversible coma. New Jersey recently passed a law which allows life support systems to be withdrawn upon the agreement of four parties: the family, two physicians, and an ombudsman appointed by the state and the hospital. In this case the two doctors and the family agreed to the withdrawal of the life support system. The patient had expressed her desire not to have dramatic measures taken. The ombudsman refused. Why did he refuse? He refused, he said, "reluctantly," because the ~~state~~ law required that the doctors certify that the patient <sup>could</sup> not



live for a full year in her present condition. The two doctors could not certify that this patient might not survive on machinery for another year. Medicine is not an absolute science. It will require something on the order of \$100,000 to maintain this comatose woman, this vegetable, for a year. Full scholarships to a special school could be provided to ten deprived, but talented, children for the cost of her care.

It is estimated that our society spends one percent of the gross national product on the management and care of those who are in the last year of their lives. Obviously, some of that money is usefully spent, but, surely, not all. This \$100,000 is a worthless expenditure.

At some point, the issue of the quality of life must be taken into consideration. I read to you this morning Ecclesiastes' musings on age, "on the evil days which come when we say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'" There is a time when society must allow people to die. It is a crime that there are now cases in our courts of people on mattress graves who want to die but where the hospital and the state stand in the way.

All of us must begin to give more thought to what we mean when we say, "We revere life." Must life be preserved at all cost and at all expense? Obviously, there are limits. At some point the oldest-old or their advocates must accept that God wisely set up life as He did. Death is a natural part of life. There are many things worse than death - protracted dying, for instance. We must begin to understand that it is not the same thing to spend money to preserve the non-life of someone whose body and mind are falling apart and spending the same sum on a pre-natal condition where



there is some hope of a healthy resolution. There is no ultimate right of the oldest-old to live on in incapacity.

I thought I'd close this sermon with an uplifting midrash which would suggest that being old is a wonderful thing. In recent years, for many, aging has been a far more agreeable time, but age is a burden to those whose aging is limiting and painful. Then I thought I'd end this sermon with a bit of uplift which would suggest that you are all going to be full of health and full of years, young-old until the day of your death at one hundred and twenty. "Alevai." I'll simply end by repeating my message to the young-old or those who will be some day: begin now to plan. In many ways the challenge facing the young-old is greater than that which we faced when we were planning our careers. There are few guideposts. The society has no well-established, post-employment system. But the years are there and it would be a terrible waste not to make use of our opportunity.



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Travels was 1907 and 1908 for David 1907 and 1908







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Yours - always your truly : W. B. Smith  
Director of Left Relations - and under

It is a strong appeal to get a good education  
because it will help you in the future.

business is over I will cancel it - unless you  
say so now in ~~the~~ next few days & send me  
proofs - a refund too.

[illegible]

and the in complete details in and for the  
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good - But what is kind therapy -  
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connected with it - The writing of the  
new constitution of our country, and the  
new constitution of our country.











There are said to be numbers. These to suit, new - 100 to  
 1000. - But my 4 is very - used with my own dear  
 eyes - now ~~the~~ <sup>how</sup> see - of used all case  
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 "2 - 100 to 1000" - a small map - a lot of over,  
 a map - and will be in the book -

The story of how you - also in the present  
for - friends intended as well as us also - by 4  
help - Sanctus entire represented by in clear  
down - Peace Requiem more quietly in the 90's -  
Remember helping community in the 90's down - let  
may be not more particular - 8 in not was  
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But I'm sure my wife, as to  
hundreds of us says to her mother I'm  
to cheer her, to tell her we need support.



but as we <sup>become old - old</sup> ~~understand~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> ~~going~~ <sup>going</sup> to face ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~same~~ <sup>same</sup> ~~problems~~ <sup>problems</sup> - WELFARE - DEPENDENCY - THE NEED FOR ELDERLY SUPPORT & CARE - In 1984 117m GNP was spent on health care. 1/3 of that was 127c per person ~~more~~ <sup>more</sup> ~~on an~~ <sup>on an</sup> ~~old~~ <sup>old</sup> & people become old - old - dependent ~~by~~ <sup>by</sup> ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> ~~any~~ <sup>any</sup> ~~become~~ <sup>become</sup> ~~increasingly~~ <sup>increasingly</sup> ~~dependent~~ <sup>dependent</sup> ~~on~~ <sup>on</sup> ~~institutions~~ <sup>institutions</sup> & ~~costs~~ <sup>costs</sup> - ~~but~~ <sup>but</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~more~~ <sup>more</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~population~~ <sup>population</sup> ~~grows~~ <sup>grows</sup> -

The case of the missing is one of intense interest  
has been raised - it is far different - it is a  
total loss of contact with the person - but  
incomplete the answers & questions of what has happened  
have never been asked! How do we know who's who? -  
We can't answer such simple questions, so serious to  
die? We must be able to identify each other?  
Just think the NY Times reported on the case of a boy  
who was - well he was in a coma - NT found him  
a few days later, he was revived by surgery, 2  
months later he was reported on television most  
likely - The young man's father said "He was  
but told me nothing" - "He was very nervous"  
The children said No - definitely - He said he  
would talk to Mrs. but he was too shy to speak  
because of his age - he couldn't - he was  
shy because of his age - yet he had never  
- to the NHS, because of this - medical history



File 1

WRHS  
AMTRIC JEWISH  
RCE

[illegible]

19 Letter to the Editor 19 Letter to the Editor



A large note - 2 pages and sides (on back)  
back (and - left second support back on study room  
side can for the study room to provide more interest

2 pages full of text to write the side  
of case - over - second page  
and to provide if copy note -

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