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## *Inequality in Old Age.* John A. Vincent. Reviewed by Martin Tracy, Southern Illinois University.

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made by people who are not. This book ought to be required reading for every elected official and every talking head who call for reform without first calling for accurate information.

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John A. Vincent, *Inequality in Old Age*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. \$ 49.95 hardcover.

Inequality generated by distinctions based on class, ethnicity, and gender is a social and economic concern that transcends age. Unfortunately, inequality tends to be exacerbated in old age, assuming a greater impact that leads to more hardships and deprivation for many elderly persons. Individuals who have experienced discrimination and social or economic marginalization throughout the life cycle are even more susceptible in old age.

This text explores the relationship between inequality and old age by examining the impact of social stratification, class, gender, race and ethnicity over the life course. The author suggests that most sociological studies of inequality and old age provide a limited snapshot view of the conditions faced by the elderly. What is needed, it is argued, is a method that examines inequality as a process over the life course to address the central question of "how do old age and inequality fit together in society?"

A process analysis method sheds light on the conditions that historical and contemporary structures have created under which elderly people are more likely to be exploited. In addition to class, race, and gender, for example, inequality in old age reflects the afflictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism. These economic and social developments have led to an exploitation of labor, including the artificial and detrimental development of the concept of dividing the life course into pre-work, work and post-work. They also reflect the economic subordination of women based on the gender division of labor which is carried into old age. The discussion on how these and other structures impact inequality in old age is quite detailed and informative.

This book is particularly valuable for those interested in theories of inequality and social theories of aging. The author provides

a useful overview and cogent analysis of predominant theories. There is also an insightful chapter on old age and the symbolic order which discusses the cognitive categories and the structural meaning of "old." While most of the references are related to the British experience, many are equally applicable to the United States.

This is not an easy book to assimilate in a brief period. It does, however, make an excellent reference text. Its strength is that it informs and stimulates thinking about the interaction of theories of inequality and aging while arguing convincingly for a systemic or process oriented analytical method.

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