



2007

The Experience of Retirement. Robert S. Weiss.

Nancy Giunta
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Giunta, Nancy (2007) "*The Experience of Retirement.* Robert S. Weiss.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 34 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol34/iss1/20>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



will integrate into European societies in much the same way as did the "old immigrants". The problem, he contends, is the limited opportunities for new immigrants to integrate rather than their willingness to identify with their new societies. Continued unemployment, racism, limited educational opportunities and other factors pose a greater threat to social stability than immigration itself.

Lucassen's book is well written and extremely well researched. The author draws on a great deal of interesting historical and ethnographic information and he obviously knows the material extremely well. His case studies are well chosen and provide important insights into the way different immigrant groups adapted to host societies in different periods of time. His conclusions are thoughtful and balanced. His book makes a significant contribution to current immigration debates and should be widely consulted.

Robert S. Weiss, *The Experience of Retirement*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2005. \$18.95 papercover.

As the baby boom generation approaches retirement age, and as members of this generation expect to live healthier, longer lives, the body of literature on retirement and the "second half of life" or "the third age" is growing. *The Experience of Retirement*, Robert Weiss' view of the lives of 89 retirees, is both timely and insightful. The book focuses on the experience of retirement through all of its stages: planning for it, leaving the workforce, and adapting to it. The method of conducting in-depth interviews before, during, immediately after, and one year after retirement provides rich longitudinal data to document this major phase of the life course. It also gives the reader the opportunity to view the experience of retirement as a multi-year process.

Weiss begins with a summary of multi-disciplinary perspectives on retirement by providing economic, psychological, and sociological definitions of retirement. Next, an exploration of the transition period, from the workforce world to the retirement world, is presented. In this exploration of the

transition period between the roles of worker and retiree, he addresses three topics: (1) reasons for retirement (attractions of leisure, disabilities, desire to leave a particular workplace, workplace-initiated retirement, or a reframing of unemployment); (2) the actual departure from the job; and (3) specific gains and losses commonly perceived. This exploration incorporates especially poignant discussions, and direct quotes from respondents, around the issues of identity and community.

Weiss then brings us into the world of retirement by weaving respondents' stories through a framework consisting of four dimensions: money, social isolation, time, and personal relationships. His investigation into all four of these dimensions sets the stage for further research. Particularly worth exploring further are the issues of social isolation and personal relationships, including marriage and family issues as well as the provision of care between family members. Again, the words of respondents themselves are skillfully interspersed to illustrate the diverse personal experiences across dimensions.

The retirement experience of those less secure financially, and those who pursue unconventional retirement experiences are not addressed in this book. However, Weiss' documentation of the experience of the traditional upper-middle-class view of retirement provides an excellent framework that ties together what he calls "the scattered probings and economic research" into the experience of retirement. This framework provides a foundation for future "probings" of the experiences not captured by Weiss.

The book is engaging and accessible to both academic and general audiences, and comes at a point in time when the experience of retirement will likely begin to change significantly. Just as the baby boom generation has altered each stage of the pre-retirement life course, this cohort will surely alter the views and practices around retirement in the future. This puts Robert Weiss at the forefront of helping to change the view of retired people from marginalized members of society to productive, active, healthy adults. As the body of literature on retirement continues to grow, this book provides a much needed framework for future research.

Nancy Giunta, University of California, Berkeley