

Book Review: Laura L. Carstensen et al., *Civic Engagement in an Older America*, Gerontological Society of America, 2010

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The news is replete with stories about the aging of the “baby boom generation” in America. Recent demographic statistics show that the number of people over 65 years old is significantly rising in the United States. Much of this is attributed to the two facts: the first wave of baby boomers will be 65 years old in 2011 and people are living longer than in the past 40 years. American society is adapting to this population shift by focusing consumer products, entertainment, health care, and public services to this generation.

Surprisingly, the book *Civic Engagement in an Older America* is not about providing services for the aging population. The Gerontological Society of America wrote the book to encourage civic involvement by older Americans. Their goal is to promote mental health and physical fitness by keeping older Americans involved in service activities. A variety of studies started during the Reagan presidency investigated and supported the value of promoting the health of the elderly by encouraging active and productive lifestyles.

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This book is a compilation of commentaries and studies about engaging older adults in meaningful civic activities. All of the articles were previously published in foremost peer-reviewed gerontology journals within the past 25 years. Much of the information is still relevant for today and is supported by contemporary research studies. The introductory chapter summarizes the civic enterprise as a variety of volunteer activities for older adults. It also provides a long list of websites appropriate as adult civic engagement resources.

Chapter 2 describes the principles and challenges civic engagement with older adults. It emphasizes how volunteerism can mutually benefit retired adults and society. The research describing what is known and not known about older adult volunteerism is covered in Chapter 3. Civic engagement activity outcomes are discussed in the next chapter. Chapter 5 concludes the book with critical assessments and ethics issues related to volunteerism using older adults.

Each chapter begins with an annotated list of key points covered in the chapter. Ample primary references accompany each chapter as well as useful tables and figures. A useful bibliography is also provided. The book lacks an index, making it difficult to look up key concepts or terms from the chapters. Its content is consistent with the philosophy and practices of other organizations such as the American Society on Aging, Experience Corps, United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration of Aging, and Volunteers of America.

This book is a valuable reference for civic engagement and service learning office libraries. The book presents creative ways that community partners and colleges can develop service opportunities for older adults. It also provides an abundance of research that supports the benefits and value of volunteerism by older adults. The book is available at the Gerontological Society of America online store and at Amazon.com.