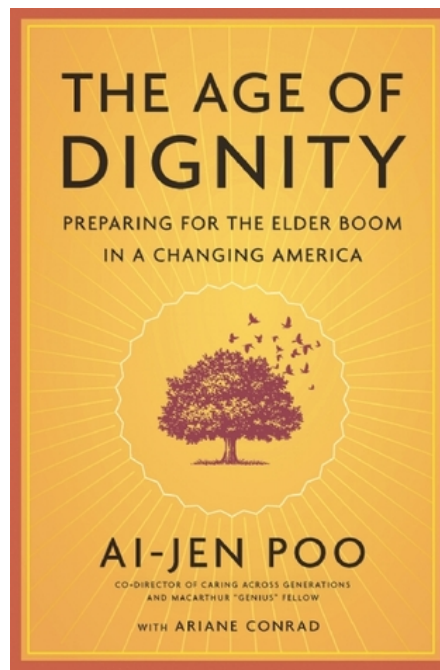




The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in a Changing America

Ai-jen Poo

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By 2035, 11.5 million Americans will be over the age of eighty-five, more than double today's 5 million, living longer than ever before. To enable all of us to age with dignity and security in the face of this coming Age Wave, our society must learn to value the care of our elders. The process of building a culture that supports care is a key component to restoring the American dream, and, as Ai-Jen Poo convincingly argues, will generate millions of new jobs and breath new life into our national ideals of independence, justice, and dignity.

This groundbreaking new book from the director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance offers bold solutions, such as long-term care insurance and cultural change to get all of us to value care, which is already at the heart of a movement transforming what it means to grow old in the United States. At the intersection of our aging population, the fraying safety net, and opportunities for women and immigrants in the workforce, *The Age of Dignity* maps an integrated set of solutions to address America's new demographic and economic realities.

The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in a Changing America Details

Date : Published February 3rd 2015 by The New Press

ISBN : 9781620970386

Author : Ai-jen Poo

Format : Hardcover 176 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Social Science, Social Work, Economics, Health, Health Care, Nurses, Nursing, Audiobook

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Marie says

"If you make it to age seventy-five having survived the threat of cancer and organ failure, the likelihood is that you will make it to eighty-five, even ninety-five or beyond one hundred."

"Research shows that caring for aging parents shared among siblings often causes childhood family dynamics to reignite, old wounds to reopen, and the healing of family therapy to come undone."

"Family caregivers sacrifices create a domino effect, hurting the caregiver's children and other family members, not to mention society and the economy as a whole."

"Avoiding a dying person deprives us of one of the most meaningful opportunities in life: to get closure and say goodbye."

"The baby boomer generation causes the number of individuals in the United States who are 65 years of age or older to increase from 40 million to 70 million during the next 20 years."

"Social Security is the principal source of income for nearly 2/3 of older American households."

Dani Levine says

This book provides a necessary introduction to issues we aren't but should be talking about. Our nation, like others, is experiencing a growth in the elder population, and we are immensely unprepared to deal with both the elders themselves and their grossly underpaid and undervalued caregivers.

Although the writing was a bit repetitive at times, the message is worth repeating, and hopefully this book is just the beginning of a very important conversation that will effect change. We must elevate our view of caregivers and provide them with the same respect we wish them to provide for our elders.

Bevan says

This book is an important addition to the literature on aging and work in America. It is written with an incredible warmth and understanding of the vast subjects of eldercare and caregiving in this country. It is impossible to read without relating some parts of it to your own experience, either as a senior, a caregiver, a parent, a child, or a member of the so-called "sandwich generation," those with children of their own and elder parents. I am recommending this book to everyone I know. Indispensable.

Dee Halzack says

Excellent book. Addresses everything regarding the increasing proportion of the American population that is aging and needs or will need services, from the demographics, to what is needed, to the "sandwich" generation, to the workers, to how to pay for it, to some solutions from other countries.

And, because, according to the author, without the immigrants who perform many of the services (and yes, many are currently undocumented) it touches on the need for immigration reform. E.g., were you aware that American citizen children born to undocumented immigrant parents can be and are taken from their parents and placed in foster care. And, because of the way the system works, the parents may not receive notice of hearings, be deemed incompetent when they don't show up, and have their parental rights terminated and their children put up for adoption.

The poor pay and treatment of home care workers is a direct result of racist and sexist practices that excluded from labor protection laws those jobs that were staffed predominantly by females of color and immigrants.

I highly recommend it if you're interested in the topic. A quick read once I got into it in spite of being so comprehensive.

Charlotte says

3.5 stars. Interesting and once I realized it's really about the care workers more than the elders themselves, I found it easier to read. It made good and important points, but they were maybe a bit repetitive for such a short book.

Ellyn Lem says

This book was recommended to me by someone who heard Ai-jen Poo on NPR and knew I would be interested. I love the title of her book "age of dignity" and her passion and commitment to do more for caregiving as a profession and as something families do for their own. She has a good mix of personal anecdotes from her own family's experience with caregiving and many of the people she has known who work in this capacity since she has helped them organize into a union. Some of the book reads a little too much like a "manifesto" of what she wants to have happen, which made the book less compelling than others I have read on similar topics. Still, Poo makes a convincing case that the "elder boom" is happening and there are ways our country can learn from others like Japan to take steps for a smoother transition to the dramatic rise in seniors. Her advice is practical and wise--whether it will be heeded (e.g., some involved easing immigration restrictions for care workers that are going to be badly needed), especially in this current administration, is very doubtful; still, one can hope.

Heather says

An interesting and important look at dealing with our growing aging populations. There were enlightening profiles of people who have made care-giving a career as well as people providing care for family members. There are a lot of things to think about and plan for both for individuals and for society as a whole. The

author raised some important systemic issues such as health insurance, immigration reform, and protections for domestic workers that our politicians really need to buckle down and actually make progress on. There's also a lot of food for thought for individuals thinking about how their lives might be impacted by caring for an aging family members and also for how they'll deal with their own inevitable decline. The author has some interesting ideas for addressing both systemic and individual issues. I particularly liked the concept of care vouchers where you get credit for providing voluntary care for someone that you can then redeem later for voluntary care from someone else.

Esther Kim says

Ai-Jen Poo beautifully weaves her own personal narrative into a concise, dynamic analysis of the U.S. healthcare system. The deep compassion and love she holds for the people she works with (the National Domestic Workers Alliance, for example) can be strongly felt from within her prose. Ai-Jen Poo's visionary solutions to the current unsustainable health care system also give me hope and renewed energy to work towards a more care-centric and care-valuing economy and society - for myself and for my loved ones. I highly recommend this book to anyone who feels hopeless and disempowered by the often overwhelming demands of caregiving, whether it be in your workplace or in your home; Ai-Jen Poo's activist work and writing have encouraged and challenged me to not only acknowledge and validate the struggles and sacrifice that caregivers must make, but also to embrace the joy and celebration of life inherent in caregiving, and to re-envision the way that caregiving can be done in a more communal, sustainable way.

Jlem says

The first half of this book was wonderful. It was informative and resonant with experience. Poo does a great job of understanding and highlighting the hardships facing families as they mount the challenge of maintaining quality of life while coping with diminishing independence of loved ones. Unfortunately in the middle of the book Poo adulterates her purpose. She leaves the world of Elder-care and goes on a tirade about immigration and minimum wages. Her premise that elder-care will remain the domain of immigrants after a time when the job requires training, is respected, and employees are well paid smacks of intellectually dishonesty. She claims it is only fair to give citizenship to anyone who comes to America to take care of the elderly. Elder care is not the place to have a debate about a path to citizenship. She also implies that quality elder-care dependent on a wage of \$15 an hour. Although I am a proponent of a living wage set into public policy again I do not think Elder-care is the appropriate arena for this discussion. Poo claims to stay focused on her agenda explicitly saying she is avoiding topics such as child-care and care for individuals with disabilities. It was incredibly disappointing to see an author with such understanding of the problem hijack her own book to other socio-political motives.

Anne Libera says

Full disclosure, I am working with Ai-jen and her team on using improvisation in care situations -both to bring to light the plight of caregivers as well as for use in caregiving situations. Having said that I found this book to be moving, hopeful, and an inspiring call to action. We are all involved in caregiving - we will all at some point in time be called upon to give or receive care and to work with those who provide care

professionally. It is important for us to reflect on its value and to put that value at the forefront of our policy decisions.

Susan Mumpower-spriggs says

Based on just the ideas, I would give this book five stars. She addresses one of the most urgent issues we face as a society -- and are currently failing. Ai-jen Poo offers a vision of what we need to do, if we only find the collective will to do it. Her vision is not pie in the sky; it is a realistic and a caring one of which we are capable: providing training, livable wages, and support to caregivers, helping elders to stay in their homes (more economical than facility care), and making our communities more aware of one another and our needs. Brava to her. She has done real work on the ground helping to organize home care workers, so she directly knows both caregivers and the cared for and the realities they face.

Robert Wechsler says

This book is a double call for action. It calls for fair treatment of caregivers, with a focus on those who take care of the elderly. And it calls for the creation of a Care Grid, by which our society can best care for the elderly. One of the goals is the dignity of both the caregiver and the cared-for.

Unfortunately, the book is padded with biographical and autobiographical material that often adds little to the arguments, but is apparently what the author thinks will keep many people interested enough to read the arguments (however, the numbers on Goodreads and amazon.com imply there are few people buying the book).

What to do with my generation as it ages should be a top priority in the U.S., but is not. Poo's proposals should be a central part of the discussion. These proposals should also be folded into the bigger arguments about what caregivers deserve in the way of remuneration and what immigration laws our society both requires and should ethically have. In short, what sort of society do we want to live in? I want to live in one similar to Poo's descriptions.

Dave says

Poo dispenses some hard truths about what growing older might mean for us, for those we care for & those who will care for us. It's a blessing. It's a drag. It's gonna happen. Are you ready? Poo raises the typical questions and concerns regarding how we as a country and culture might come to grips with the rising cost of eldercare and projected increased elderly population. "The Age of Dignity" details a socialistic utopia fairy tale in which all individuals & forces magically align to care for the every elderly person. It's called Grid Care and Caring Across Generations. These are Poo's babies, her 9 to 5. Along with way Poo soapboxes about Women's equality, immigrant workers, tax the wealthy, etc. With scant reference to actual medicine or medicine based practices for dealing with elderly independence, aging, care of aging, understanding or altering our mindset of death, etc...this book reads like fiction.

Emily says

I feel very silly getting less than halfway through such a short book, but sometimes your library holds all come in at once [shrug]. I will say I appreciate Poo's perspective of treating this big demographic change as *not a crisis*; I'm not sure how optimistic I can be about it, but she's got a good balance of solid policy / facts & figures with a joyful understanding of her subjects' worth and humanity.

Donna says

Anyone who has ageing parents should read this. With rising healthcare costs for the elderly and the homes for the elderly, both the ones with limited care as well as full care, are expensive. Once a patient checks in, the average duration of their stay is just under 3 years before death comes.

The first half talks about the elderly and our current system for long term care, but the focus on the last half was mostly about the caregivers.

I liked the focus on the importance of dignity and security, for both the elderly and their caregivers.
