



# Anthropology & Aging

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## Book Review

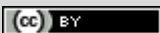
*Review of Aging in World History. David G. Troyansky. Routledge. 2016. ISBN 978-0-415-77906-7 (hbk). \$155. (Also available in paperback and as an eBook).*

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## Book Review

*Review of Aging in World History. David G. Troyansky. Routledge. 2016. ISBN 978-0-415-77906-7 (hbk). \$155. (Also available in paperback and as an eBook).*

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This work is the latest publication in Routledge's Themes in World History series. As such it is not intended as a textbook but as a means of allowing students to dig deeper into the featured theme. The author, David G. Troyansky, a specialist in French history, is Professor of History at Brooklyn College. His publications on aging, primarily in France, extend back to 1982. Early in his career Troyansky worked in a seminar with Philippe Aries, the French historian well-known for his encyclopedic works on childhood (*Centuries of Childhood* 1962) and on death (*The Hour of Our Death* 1981) albeit primarily in Western Europe. Troyansky's similarly encyclopedic *Aging in World History* continues this focus on one phase of the life course, but extends its scope well beyond Western Europe to include the Middle East, Asia, and beyond.

Troyansky examines both the population level (changing demography and its impact on state and society) and the individual level (personal experiences) of aging. Exercising the historian's craft, the author draws on a great variety of written and representational sources for his data. These sources include religious and philosophical texts, laws and regulations, census and statistical reports, the observations of contemporary writers, diaries, works of fiction, and popular and artistic representation, such as cartoons, drawings, and paintings. Troyansky acknowledges the limitations of his data, e.g., that surviving diaries are not representative, that emphases in writing change over time even if the actual situations of older people do not, that neither laws nor moral texts should be assumed to describe reality. Of particular interest to anthropologists of aging is Troyansky's use of ethnographic and comparative research when writing about the present and the near-present. He emphasizes that there should be more of these kinds of works!

The book's thirteen chapters are grouped under five sections: I Theoretical Concerns, "Natural" Aging, and Classical Prescriptions and Representations; II Medieval to Early Modern Transformations; III Transitions to Modernity; IV Modernity and Old Age, and V Globalizing, Medicalizing, and Disciplining Old Age. While any chapter in the book is a great resource for the teacher or student writing a research paper or studying for a doctoral exam, anthropologists will probably find chapters 9, 11, 12, and 13 most directly relevant for their own purposes. Chapter 9 *Old Age in the Context of Colonialism, Imperialism and Decolonization* investigates the impact of these eras on the elderly among both the settlers and the local indigenous populations in Central America, Africa, and Asia.

Chapter 11 *Aging in a Global Context* considers the impact of different rates of population aging on the status of older people and the resources available to them. While the early Western European experience of the late 19th and 20th centuries saw the growth of the economy precede the aging of the population, in most of the rest of the world these processes occurred simultaneously or the growth in the economy lagged

behind the aging of the population. Under these circumstances Troyansky asks how useful the programs and policies developed in the West will be to meeting the needs of societies whose experiences and resources are quite different.

Chapter 12 Aging, Medicalization, and the Discipline of Gerontology provides a review of medical takes on aging from antiquity to the present, from the Egyptians and the Incas to today's geriatricians. Troyansky emphasizes the multidisciplinary nature of gerontology and helps the reader get oriented by introducing the content of several of the leading handbooks in the field. Like the previous chapter, Chapter 13 Aging in Present and Future also provides a review – in this case of the main themes that have interested social scientists and policymakers working in the field including pension reform, retirement, the reconfiguration of the lifecourse, gender and ethnic differences in the experience of aging, etc. These two final chapters provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the scholarly work in the field of gerontology.

*Aging in World History* is a dense book, packed with information, and rich in references. As such it is likely too much for the uninitiated reader taking an introductory course on aging though the instructor of that course will find it invaluable.