

# The Liberation of Growing Old

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## *The New York Times:*

LONDON — WHY do we have such punitive attitudes toward old people? Granted, the ancients did hideous things to elders who were unable to work but still needed food and care, but in more recent times, that had changed: In 18th-century New England, it was common for people to make themselves seem older by *adding* years to their real age, rather than subtracting them.

Once upon a time, “senile” just meant old, without being pejorative. Even “geriatric” was originally a value-free term, rather than part of the lexicon of contempt toward old people.

Yet today, the language used to describe the changing age composition of the population is little short of apocalyptic. We’re told that the “graying of America” is an “agequake” or a “demographic time bomb.”

Older people are likely to be seen as a burden and a drain on resources, rather than a resource in themselves. Their only contribution, it seems, is to make worse the “dependency ratio,” a term that enshrines dubious assumptions about who will be financially dependent on whom.

Read the whole story: [\*The New York Times\*](#)