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Book Review: Encore Adulthood: Boomers on the Edge of Risk, Renewal, and Purpose by Phyllis Moen

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PHYLLIS MOEN

Encore Adulthood: Boomers on the Edge of Risk, Renewal, and Purpose

New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 328 p. \$24.95 (pbk.).

The US labor force aged 16 and over currently is composed of three large generations: Baby Boomers (30 percent, born 1946–1964), Generation X (34 percent, born 1965–1980), and Millennials (32 percent, born 1981–1996). All three are having difficulty following the standard life-course stages that had become well institutionalized in law and custom by the mid-twentieth century: childhood (education and preparation for a career), adulthood (progression through career stages), and old age (exit from the work force and retirement). Today many Millennials find little job security and no clear career paths upon graduating high school or college. Formerly one's 20s entailed a quick transition to a lifetime job, marriage, parenthood, and assumption of full adulthood responsibilities. Now many Millennials spend these years changing jobs and relationships in a new "emerging adulthood" stage marked by lingering financial and residential dependency on parents. In this book Phyllis Moen, professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota, focuses on what is happening to Baby Boomers as they approach their mid-60s, the traditional time for a quick transition from full-time work to retirement. Decades of globalization and technological innovation have altered the workplace in ways that have disrupted many Boomers' careers and left them financially unable to retire at age 65. Even those Boomers financially able to retire often have no desire to do so. Health improvements since 1950 have added to the disability-free years Americans experience; seven in ten adults aged 65–74 now live with no major disability. Moen sees changed conditions compelling Boomers to construct a new "encore adulthood" stage sandwiched between adulthood and old age. Moen uses March 2014 Current Population Survey data to compare the circumstances of "leading edge Boomers" (born 1946–1954) and "trailing edge Boomers" (born 1955–1964). These interesting tables (available at www.oup.com/us/encoreadulthood) highlight how gender, education, and race as well as birth year influence Boomers' circumstances. She also interviewed many Boomers while directing four research projects from 2002 to 2015 and effectively uses these interviews to describe the challenges that Boomers face regarding work and retirement decisions. In Chapters 2 and 3 Moen outlines how the outdated twentieth-century labor market and retirement policies still embedded in today's standard work practices are mismatched with the needs of Boomers. In Chapters 4 to 6 she describes how individual Boomers are customizing their work life and leisure decisions in an attempt to remain financially secure, emotionally fulfilled, and physically healthy during their longer lives. In Chapters 7 and 8 she highlights corporate and government attempts to offer new work options for those seeking alternatives to full-time work or total retirement, and calls for greater policy efforts to institutionalize work and leisure options for Boomers in their 60s and 70s.—D.H.