



# Social Stratification: The Elderly Part III

It's ageism, far more than the passage  
of time, that makes growing older  
harder for all of us.

Ashton Applewhite

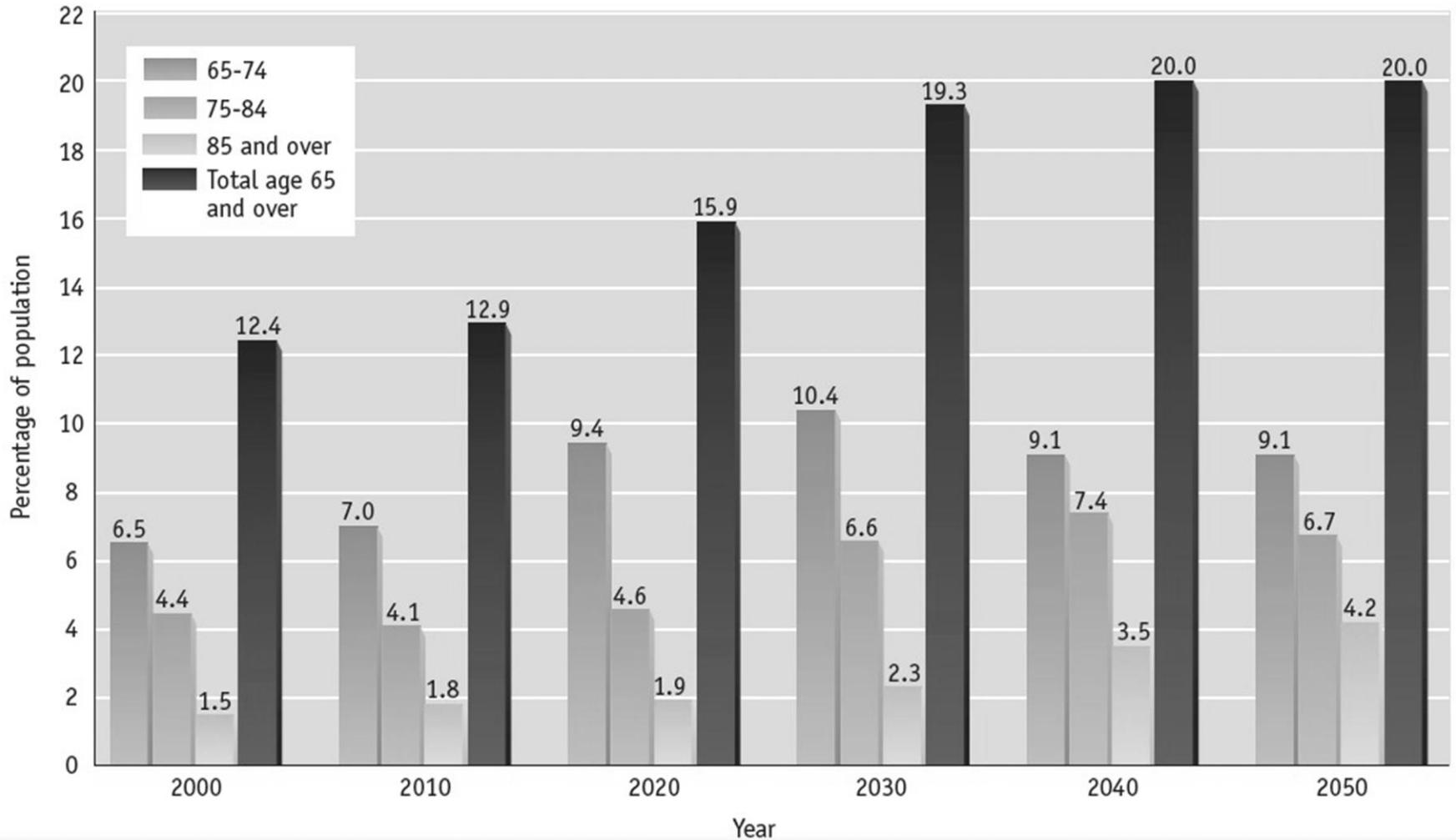


# Conflict Perspective on Aging

- In developing countries, the transition from agricultural economies to industrialization and capitalism is not always beneficial to elderly.
  - elderly victimized by social structure
  - social roles relatively unchanged but devalued
- Conflict perspective sees ageism as eliminating youth and the elderly from competition over scarce resources.
- From a conflict perspective, the low status of elderly is reflected in prejudice and discrimination against them and in unfair job practices.



# Elderly as a Percentage of US Population, 2000-2050





# Conflict Perspective on Aging

- **example: US federal protections for the elderly**
  - *The paramount short-term factor in Social Security's birth was the Great Depression ... It was imperative to get the elderly out of the job market ... so younger workers with families could have jobs.*
  - Numbers who collect Social Security are growing, while numbers who are working (those who pay) are shrinking.
  - Today, some want to trim Social Security, Medicare and other programs available to the elderly.
    - *Congress has caved in and given too many benefits to old people.*



# Conflict Perspective on Aging

- **example: US federal protections for the elderly**
- To protect their gains, older Americans have organized a powerful political lobby.
- The AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) boasts 37 million members and a staff of 1,986 (2016). Difficult for politicians to ignore these numbers.
- The interests of younger and older groups are on a collision course.

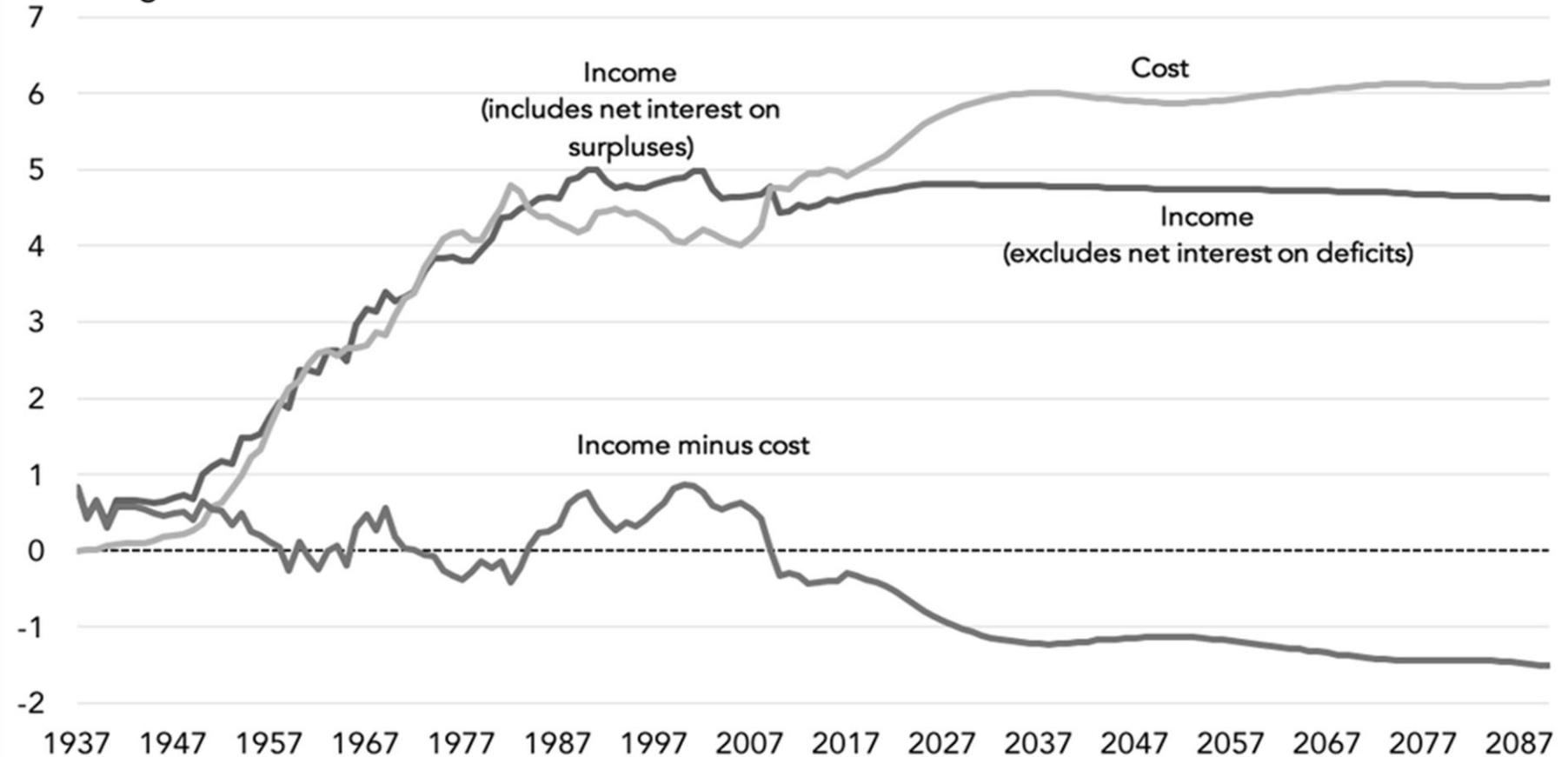
**AARP**<sup>®</sup>

**Real Possibilities**



# Social Security Cost and Income as a Percentage of GDP, 1937-2090

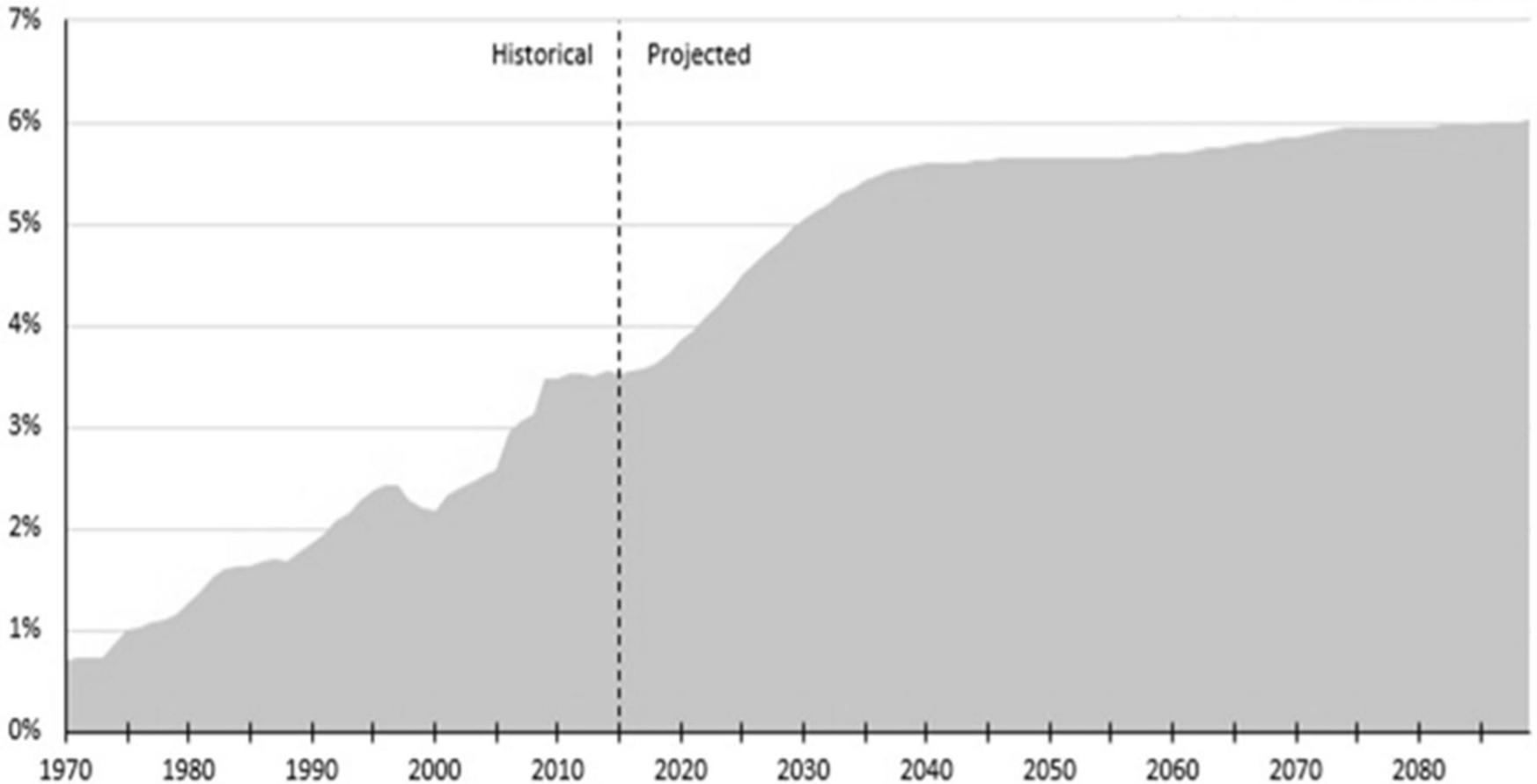
Percentage of GDP



Source: Calculations from data from 2016 OASDI Trustees' Report, Annual Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, and BEA.



# Medicare Cost as a Percentage of GDP, 1970-2089



Source: Social Security Administration



# Conflict Perspective on Aging

- **conflict theory**
  - Different age categories have different opportunities, creating a system of age stratification.
  - struggle between the young and the old ... **intergenerational conflict**
  - Middle-aged people in US enjoy the greatest power. Elderly may become second-class citizens.
  - The elderly suffer discrimination at the hands of more powerful groups.



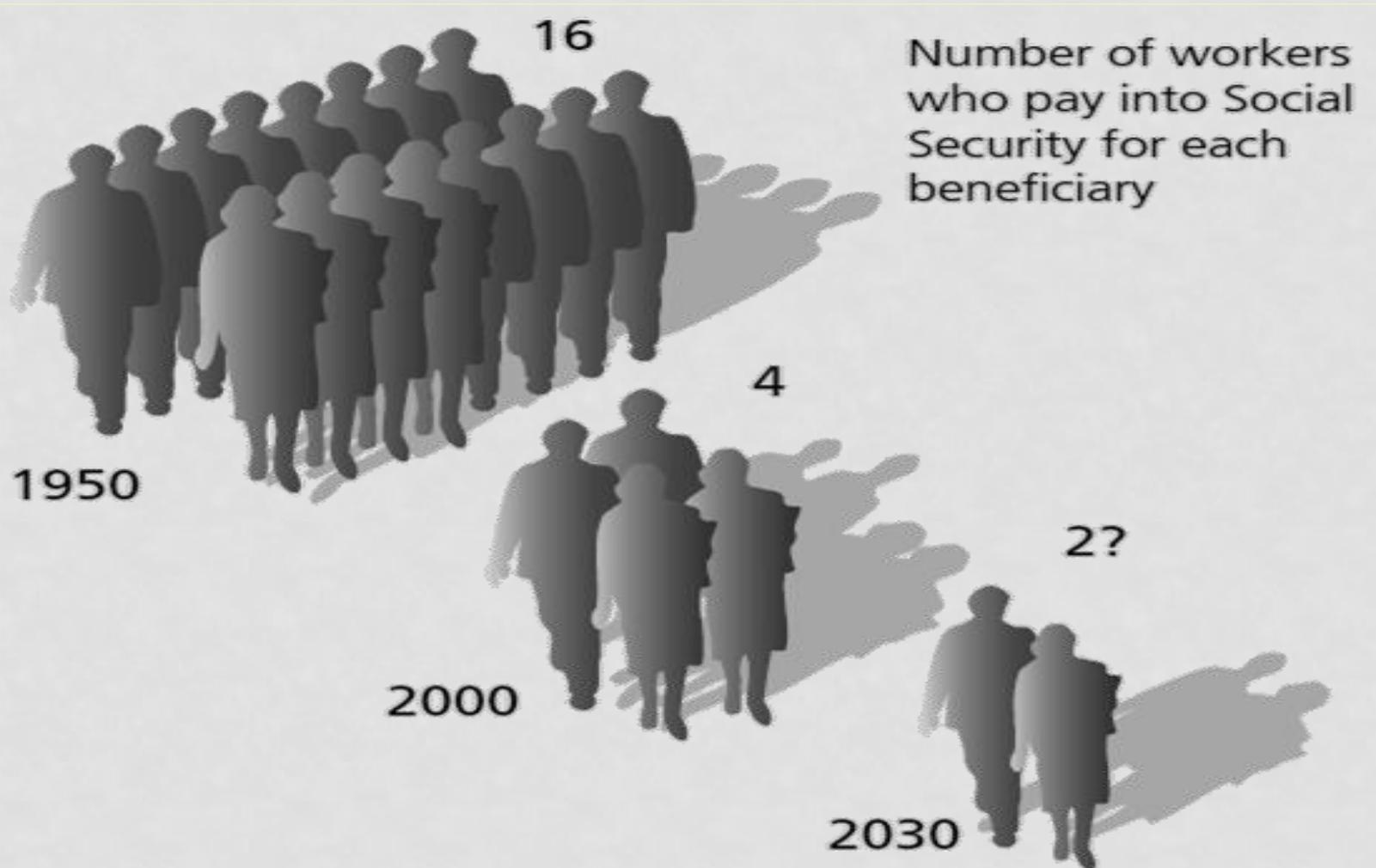
# Conflict Perspective on Aging

- **conflict theory**
  - Inequalities among elderly exist along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity and social class.
  - Age-based hierarchy is inherent in an industrial-capitalist society.
- **critical evaluation of conflict theory**
  - Elderly in some countries have increasing income and well-being.





# Number of Workers Supporting Each US Retiree





# Sociological Theories on Aging

## Theoretical Perspective

## Major Assumptions

### disengagement theory

To enable younger people to assume important roles, a society must encourage its elderly to disengage from their previous roles and to take on roles more appropriate to their physical and mental decline. A functionalist explanation of the aging process.

### activity theory

Older people benefit themselves and their society if they continue to be active. Their positive perceptions of the aging process are crucial for their ability to remain active. An interactionist explanation of the aging process.

### conflict theory

Older people experience age-based prejudice and discrimination. Inequalities among the aged exist along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity and social class. A conflict theory of society.



# Global Age Stratification

- industrialization and the graying of the globe
  - 2/3 of all people who have ever passed 50 are alive today.
- The UN predicts that most of the world will soon have an ageing population well above 20% and for about a third of the world it will be over 30%.
- The trend is having significant impacts on the structure of populations.



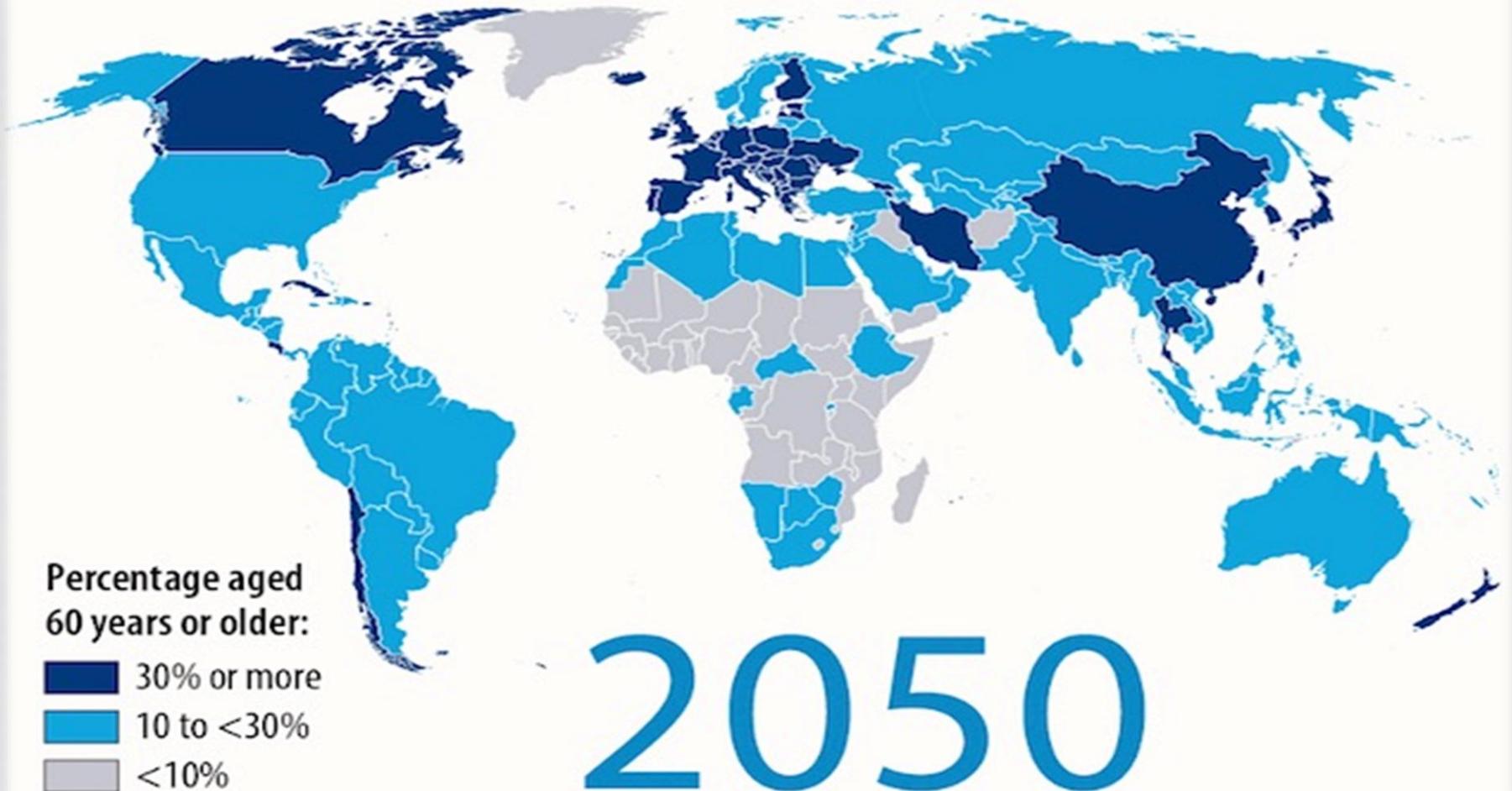


# World Population 60 and Over, 2000-2050





# Global Age Stratification





# Global Age Stratification

- In most countries, there is low priority within health policy placed on the challenge of the population change, low levels of training in geriatrics and gerontology within the health professions, and care and support for caregivers is not a priority focus of government action on ageing.
- In many parts of the world it is unsafe and impractical for elderly to leave their homes, caregivers are often untrained, and at least 1 in 10 older people is a victim of some form of elder abuse.



# Global Age Stratification

- Gaps in health care in low- and middle-income countries result in high rates of older people who have limitations in functioning.
- Cultures vary in the way they view older adults.
  - In non-industrialized countries, older adults are given more respect, even revered and seen as powerful.
    - traditional skills and knowledge
    - security of property rights
    - civil and political power
    - control and distribution of resources





# Global Age Stratification

- Cultures vary in the way they view older adults.
  - In industrialized nations, age stratification values older adults lower than adults in middle age.
- social construction of aging
  - **Native Americans**: old age is signaled by inability to perform customary roles rather than years, disabled consider themselves elderly
  - **Tiwi**: society run by elderly, all power given to elderly men, marry at age 40 all the women (young and old), frail women buried and left



# Global Age Stratification

- social construction of aging
  - **Abkhazians**: Georgian tribe, pay elderly high respect, longest lived people on earth because of diet, life-long physical activity, sense of community
  - **Inuit**: voluntary death by elderly, harsh environment makes survival tough, say goodbyes and walk out on ice if can't pull own weight and contribute to limited food supply





# Global Age Stratification

- global issues and implications
  - **health and disabilities**: growing need for health services and finance to support
  - **work and retirement**: changing shape of life course ... new patterns of both work and leisure in later life ... changing incomes of elderly ... pension needs
  - **income and poverty**: greater strain on finances for some groups in old age due to longer lives ... major poverty groups need to be reduced or eliminated



# Global Age Stratification

- global issues and implications
  - **care, family and community:** new relations between home, community and residential institutions ... needing finance and a clearer focus on the nature of care and caregivers ... problems of elder abuse and neglect ... recognition of new roles, the young old look after the old old ... new retirement colonies for different groups
  - **psycho-social:** problems of isolation through bereavement, etc ... need for new meanings of later life and communities of support ... new identities for the ageing



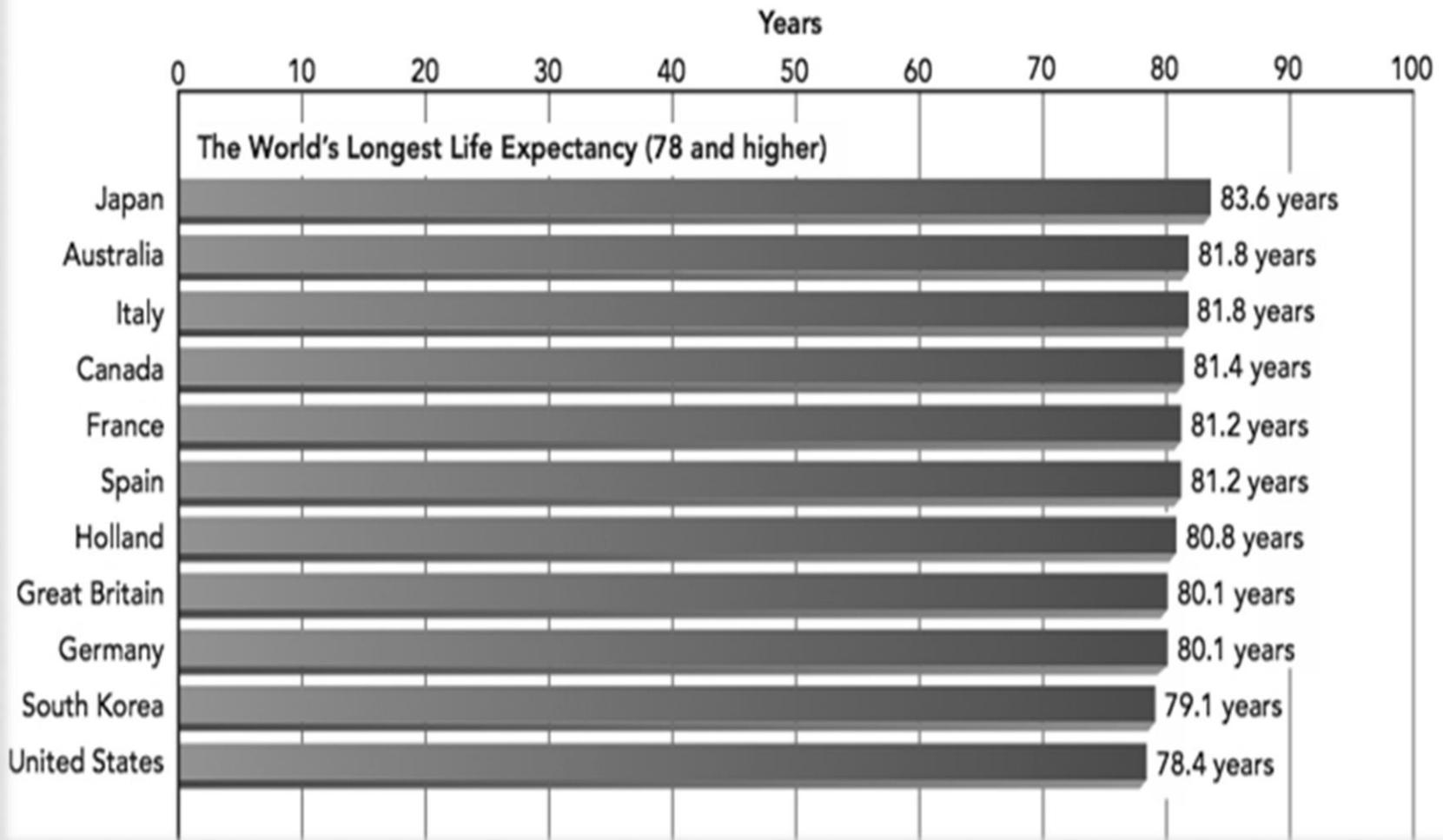


# Global Age Stratification

- global issues and implications
  - **discrimination, ageism and politics**: the rise of the grey vote ... a new politics of ageing
  - **culture**: culture has a vivid youth imagery and value base towards youth, and the old easily get 'written out' ... shifting images of ageing as more and more people fit the category and more facilities have to become available
  - **overall quality of life and well-being**: growing concerns about well-being at all stages of life

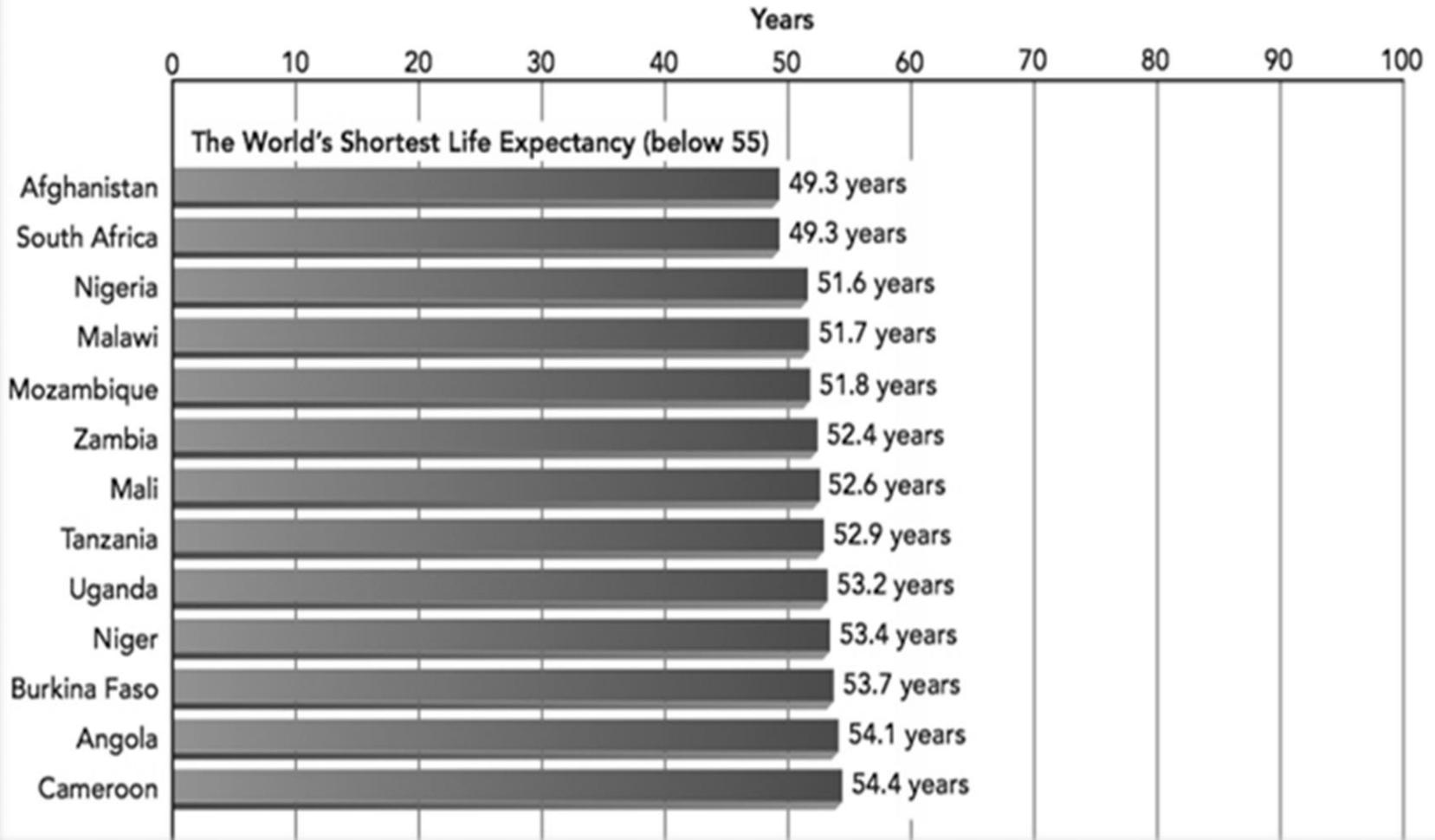


# Global Age Stratification





# Global Age Stratification





# Age Stratification in the US

- In the US, being old is a master status that seems to overshadow all others.
- The US is, as a nation, getting older.
  - In 1900, 4.1% of the population of the US was age 65 or older.
  - By 2060, almost 25% of the US population will be age 65 or older.
  - The phenomenon can no longer be ignored.



# Diversity of US Generations

- **Post-Millennials/iGeneration/Generation Z** (born 1995-2012)
  - grew up with technology and find it hard to go without their devices
  - less focused, attention spans significantly lower, better multi-taskers
  - more likely go straight into the workforce, opting to finish school online, if at all
  - more entrepreneurial, desire more independent work environments
  - have higher expectations but more frugal
  - value individuality and uniqueness
  - more global in their thinking, interactions and relatability





# Diversity of US Generations

- **Millennials/Generation Y** (born 1977-1994)
  - don't seek a job, but an opportunity
  - look for *employer's value proposition*
  - want to be happy in whatever they do (merge work and play)
  - work and life balance is essential
  - importance of technology tools ... equals comfort, creativity, freedom, fun ... virtual reality
  - no loyalty to company, but loyal to peers, team, manager
  - look for lifelong development
  - impatient ... now generation





# Diversity of US Generations

- **Generation X** (born 1965 to 1976)
  - focus on challenging work
  - look for permanent learning opportunities
  - want to be empowered
  - look for flexibility to spend time with family
  - suspicious of hierarchy / *we are equals*
  - aiming for positive relationships with colleagues
  - less loyal to the company
  - attracted by sabbaticals





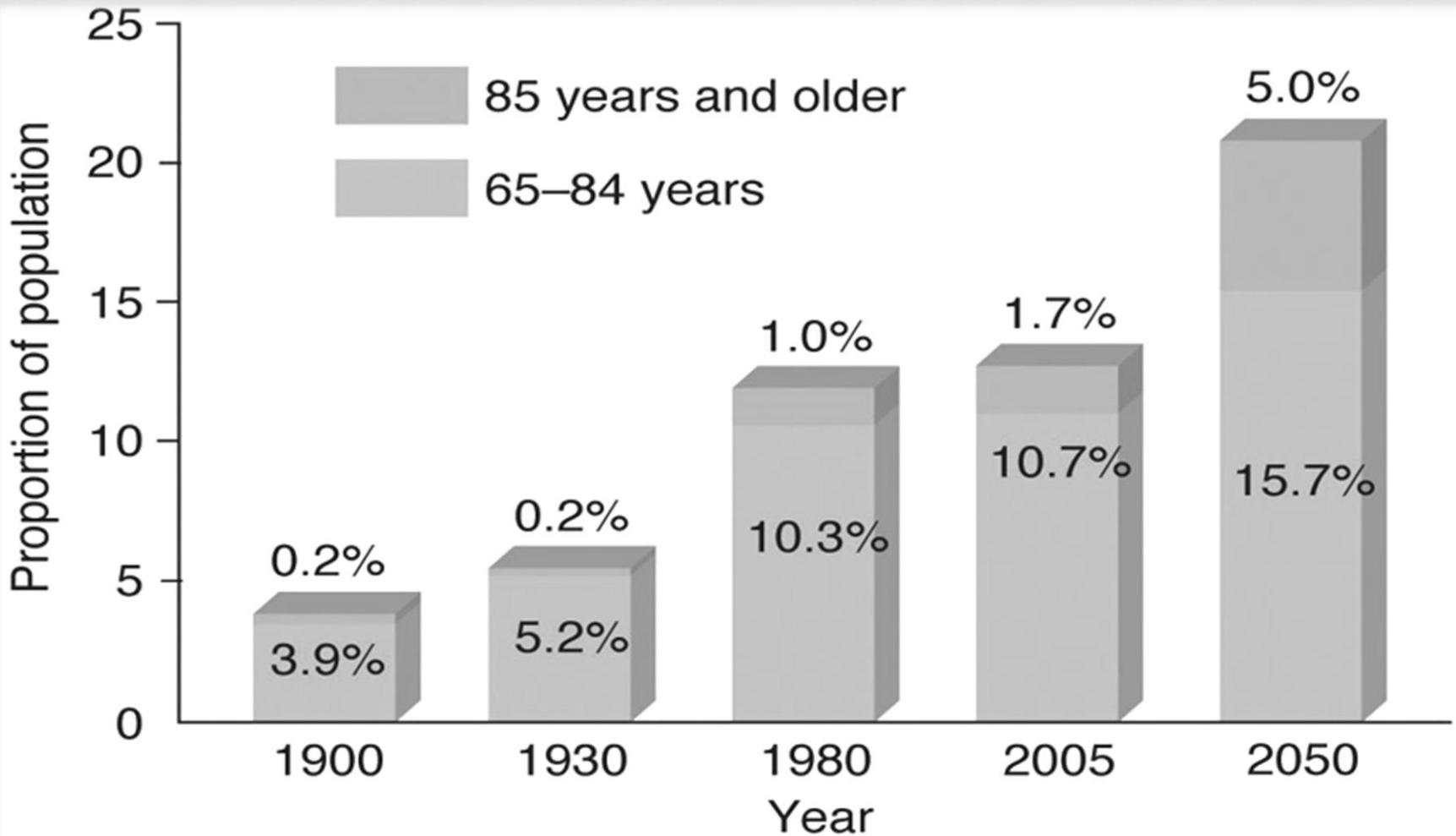
# Diversity of US Generations

- **Baby Boomer Generation** (born 1946-1964)
  - deep sense of mission
  - adaptive and flexible
  - collaborative management style
  - loyalty to company
  - look for job security
  - driven by financial rewards
  - workaholics
  - importance of clothes





# Growth of the US Elderly Population





# Age Stratification in the US

- There is a significant variation in wealth and poverty among the nation's older people
  - Typical elderly person enjoys a standard of living higher than at any point in nation's past
- Participation in paid work is not typical after age 65.
  - Younger adults tend to view older workers as job stealers.
  - Older workers can be an asset to employers.
  - Based on age stratification, the person who retires is agreeing that they are too old to perform that work anymore.



# Age Stratification in the US

- Elderly in US are better off today financially and physically than ever before but, for many, old age symbolizes disease.
- Social class and race play tremendous roles in the actual impacts of the US age stratification system.
- Those across the population who lack economic resources suffer disproportionately.





# Age Stratification in the US

Age plays a basic role in the US social structuring and institutions. It is important to realize that age, while an ascriptive status, is socially structured and transforms across time and society.

We live in a society that has become increasingly centralized on the economy as the center of life. Working, and the work one does, becomes central to concepts of self and perceptions of others.

Paid labor makes individuals not only able to function in society, but has come to define who is a productive member and who is not.



# Age Stratification in the US

Retirement forces people out of productivity. They are no longer useful to society. They are dependent on others for their survival (even if they have their own resources).

Because of the central place of work in US society, non-workers are of lower status. When something makes an age group economically dependent, they lose value within the conceptualization of the society, resulting in all the negative stereotypes of the elderly.





# Age Stratification in the US

There is another interesting twist at play within the US construction of age ... an idealization of youth. Those falling beyond that age are seen as increasingly less socially desirable.

It is difficult to overstate the impacts of age stratification in US society and individuals' day-to-day lives. From role expectations of various age strata, to stereotypes, to segregation of age groups, to social policies, age impacts everyone all of their lives.



# The End

M. Solayi