



## SAGE in Context:

### A Snapshot of Challenges to Generational Equity in the United States

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## Opportunity

We are witnessing unprecedented generational equity gaps in the United States.<sup>a</sup>

For the first time in our history, it is projected that the next generation will not have access to the same opportunities that the previous generation did.

## Education

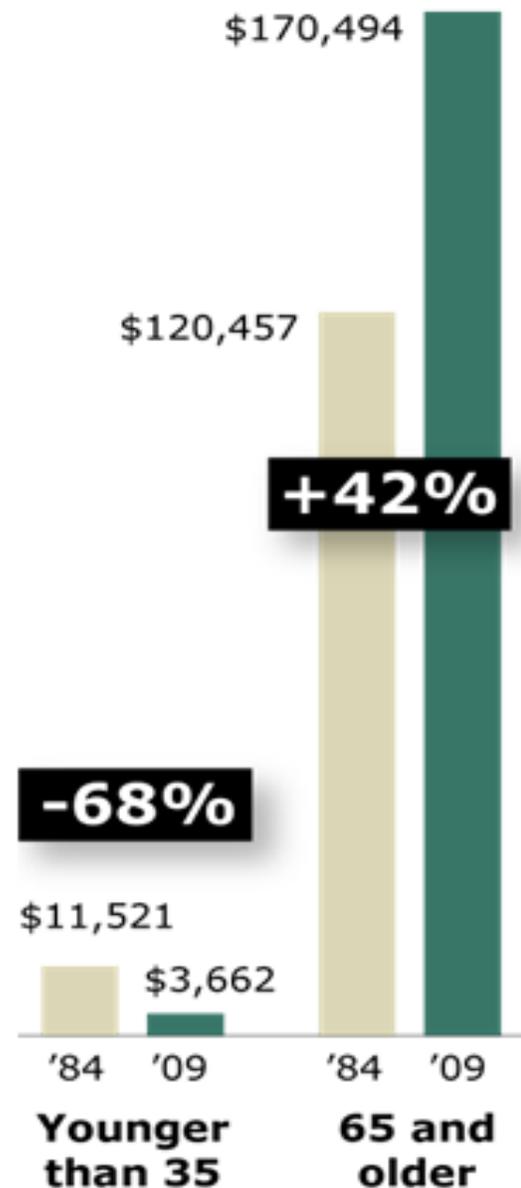
The College Board reports that students are borrowing twice what they did a decade ago after adjusting for inflation.

*According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, student loan indebtedness now exceeds all U.S. consumer credit card debt combined – over a staggering \$1 trillion.<sup>b</sup>*

College seniors who graduated with student loans in 2010 owed an average of \$25,250.<sup>c</sup> And here's what a report from the National Commission on Adult Literacy says:

### Median Net Worth by Age of Householder, 1984 and 2009

in 2010 dollars



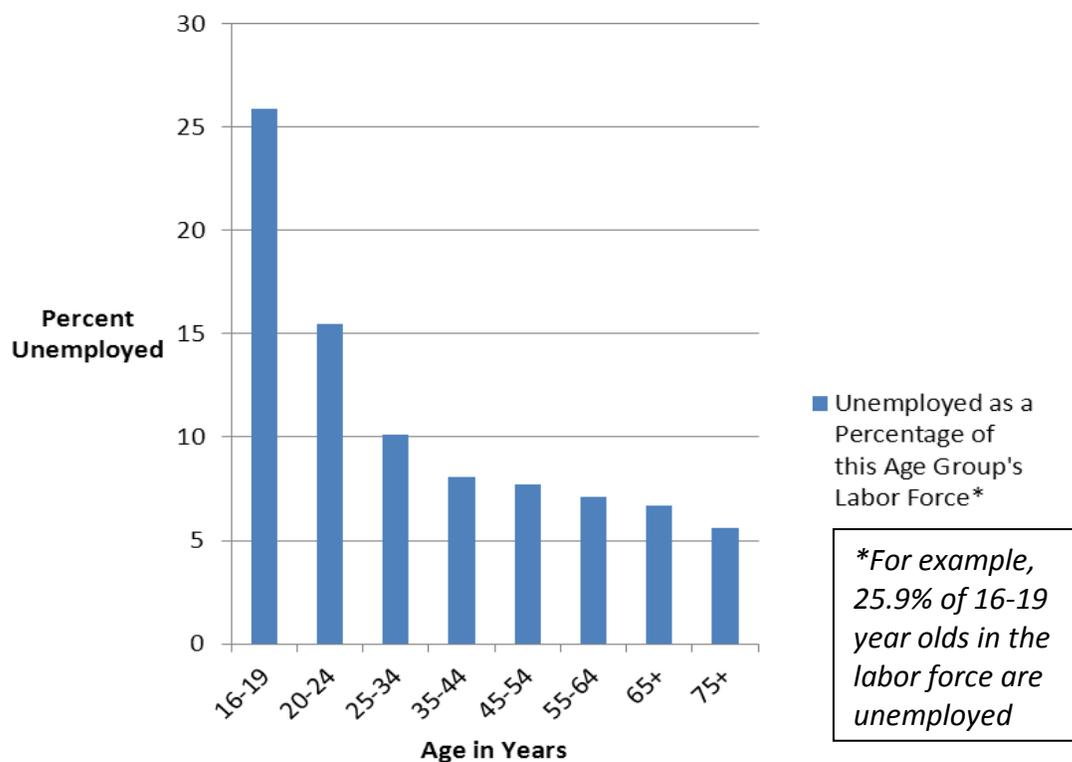
"The U.S. is the only country among 30 OECD free-market countries where the current generation is less well educated than the previous one."<sup>d</sup>

## Employment

Twenty-six percent of 16 to 19-year-olds in the labor force were unemployed as of the end of 2010 (see figure below).<sup>e</sup>

In 2011, the labor force participation rate – the proportion of the population 16 to 24 years old working or looking for work – was 59.5 percent in July, the lowest rate on record for the series, which began in 1948. (July is typically the summertime peak in youth employment.)<sup>f</sup>

**2010 Unemployment Levels by Age Group<sup>e</sup>**



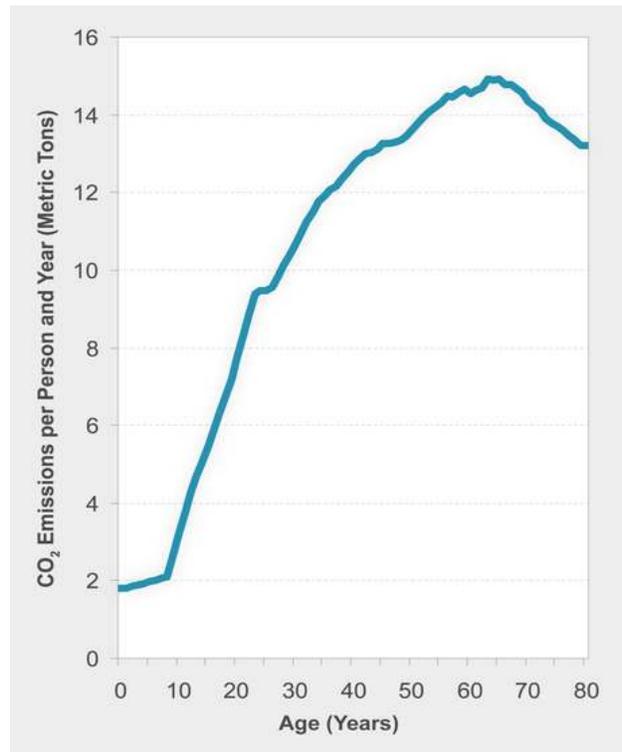
## Environment

Degradation of the earth's ecosystems, which we all depend on to provide conditions for a decent, healthy, and secure life, continues at an alarming, unsustainable rate.

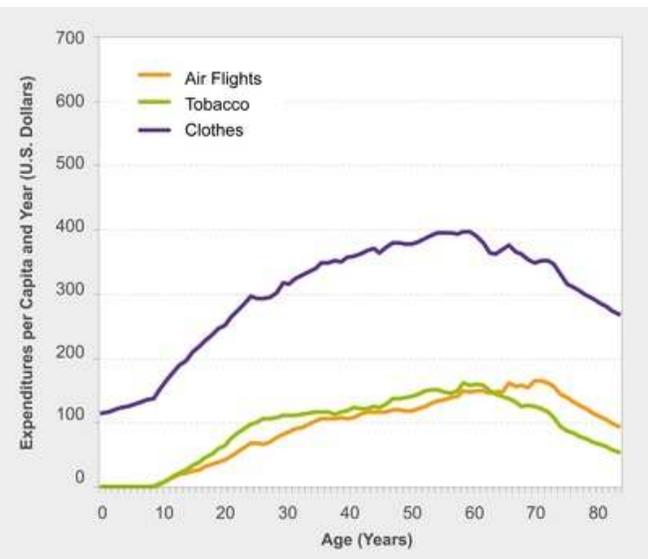
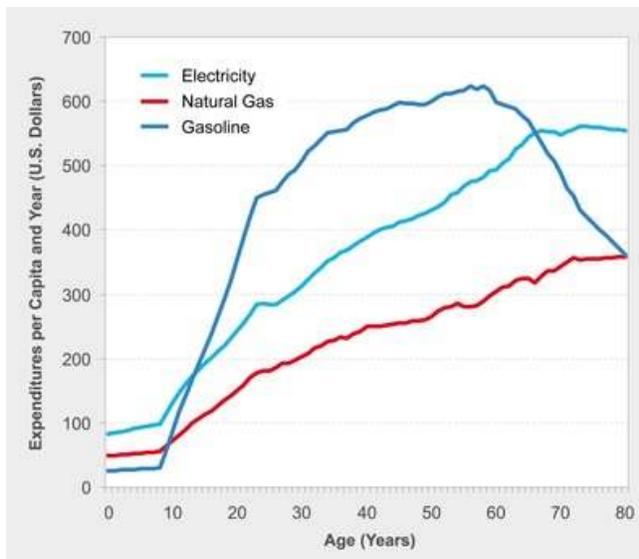
According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a 2005 project of the United Nations,

*“Human actions are depleting Earth’s natural capital, putting such strain on the environment that the ability of the planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted...Nearly two thirds of the services provided by nature to humankind are found to be in decline worldwide.”<sup>g</sup>*

American seniors entering retirement near 65 years old are at the peak of their lifetime carbon emissions, or around 14.9 metric tons annually. Overall, those aged 55 to 70 are in the highest resource consumption of their lifetimes (see below).<sup>h</sup>



Age distribution of annual carbon dioxide emissions of an average U.S. resident <sup>h</sup>

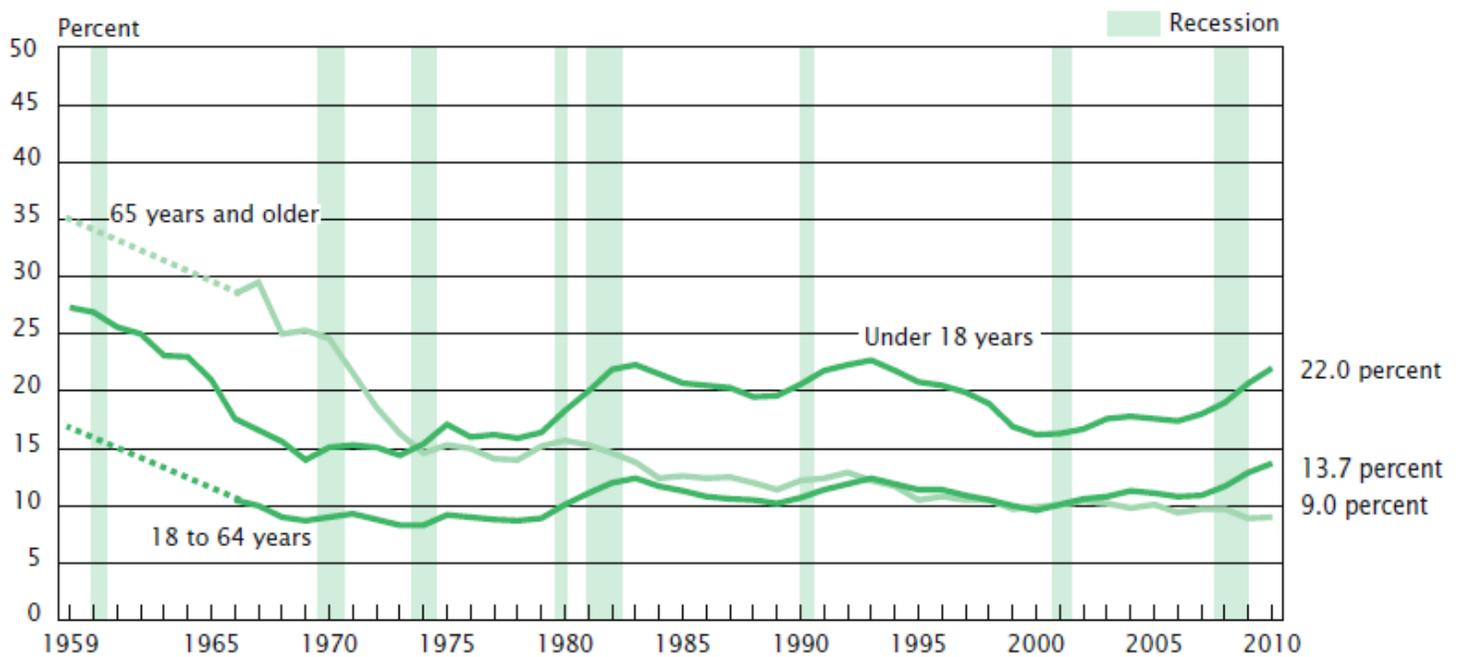


Age distribution of expenditures on energy-intensive goods (average values for U.S. resident per capita and per year in U.S. dollars) <sup>h</sup>

# Poverty

A 2011 Census Report revealed that the 2010 poverty rate, 15.1%, was the highest since 1993. The number of Americans living below the official poverty line (\$22,314 annual income for a family of four), 46.2 million people, was the highest number in the 52 years for which figures have been published.<sup>i</sup>

Figure 5.  
**Poverty Rates by Age: 1959 to 2010**



Note: The data points are placed at the midpoints of the respective years. For information on recessions, see Appendix A. Data for people aged 18 to 64 and 65 and older are not available from 1960 to 1965.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

Source: Page 17 of source i

# Health

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 50 million Americans (about 16%) are without health insurance. A large portion of the uninsured in 2010 includes young adults ages 19 to 25.<sup>j</sup>

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## January 24, 2012 Gallup Poll Report:<sup>k</sup>

- Percentage of 18-to-25-year-old Americans without medical insurance in 2011: **24.5%**
- Percentage of uninsured seniors in 2011: **3.1%**

*“Meanwhile, seniors, most of whom qualify for Medicare, and high-income Americans, not only remain among the least likely to lack coverage, but also have not seen their access decline in recent years.”*

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## Happiness

According to the World Bank, the United States has the highest GDP in the world as of 2010 as well as one of the highest life expectancies, yet ranks 114 out of 143 countries in the Happy Planet Index.<sup>l</sup> The Index is an exhaustive 2009 report by the New Economics Foundation that compiles data covering 99% of the world’s population.<sup>m</sup>

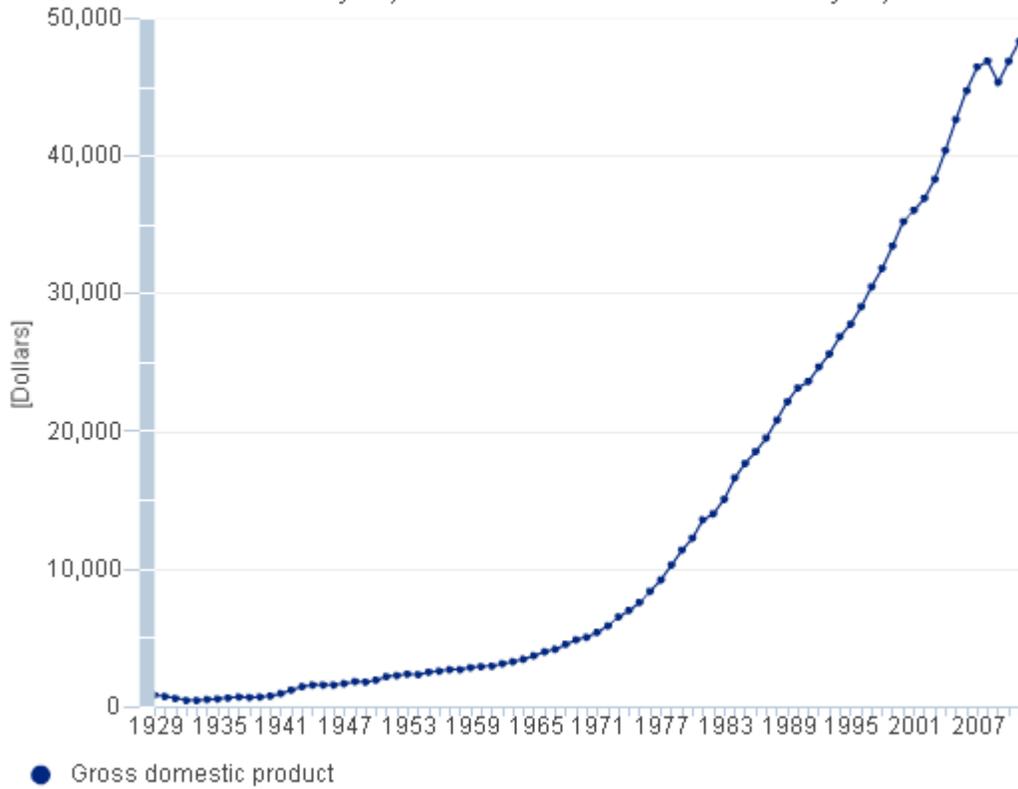
Scores range from 0 to 100 – with high scores only achievable by meeting all three targets embodied in the index – high life expectancy, high life satisfaction, and a low ecological footprint, which are indicative of sustainability of a country’s well-being. ***The United States’ score: 30.7.***

In his book *The Politics of Happiness*, former Harvard University president Derek Bok traced the history of the relationship between economic growth and happiness in America: “During the past 35 years, per capita income has grown almost 60 percent, the average new home has become 50 percent larger, the number of cars has ballooned by 120 million, and the proportion of families owning personal computers has gone from zero to 80 percent. But the percentage of Americans describing themselves as either ‘very happy’ or ‘pretty happy’ has remained virtually constant, having peaked in the 1950s. Our economic treadmill is continually speeding up due to GDP growth and we have to push ourselves ever harder to keep up, yet we’re no happier as a result.”

See the following two graphs showing GDP and happiness in the United States over time:

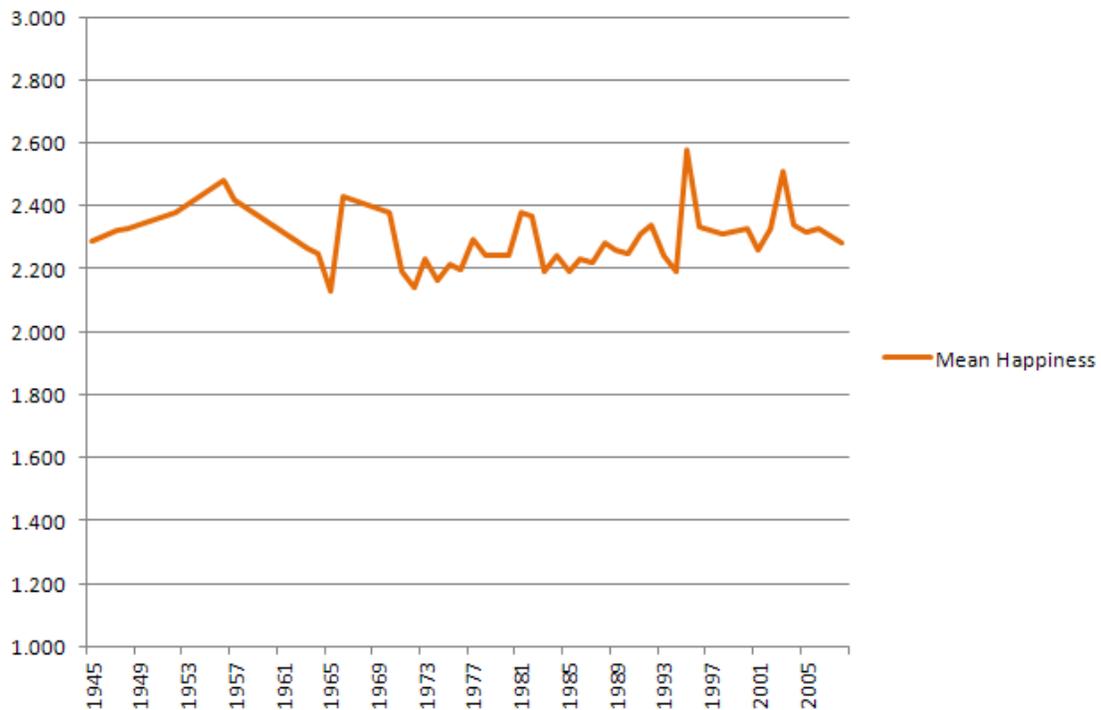
Table 7.1. Selected Per Capita Product and Income Series in Current and Chained Dollars

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Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

### Mean Happiness<sup>o</sup>



## Conclusion: Strength In Numbers

The “baby boomer” cohort, or those born from 1946 to 1964, has grown up. There are more seniors now as a proportion of the country’s population than any other time in history. Over thirteen percent of the United States population is 65 years old or older.<sup>p</sup>

*In the U.S., 10,000 people will turn 65 every day for the next 19 years.<sup>q</sup>*

According to the Census, there are currently over 800,000 Oregonians aged 55 to 74 (or about 21% of the state population).<sup>r</sup> That’s hundreds of thousands of potential SAGE advocates for future generations.

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***Leveraged by the intensifying public focus on inequity in our country, SAGE is poised to play an instrumental role in protecting the quality of life for future generations.***

**Help us build the alliance of seniors who are *giving forward* and advocating for future generations.**

### Contact Us

Senior Advocates for Generational Equity  
1515 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Suite 600  
Portland, OR 97201  
info@wearesage.org  
[www.WeAreSAGE.org](http://www.WeAreSAGE.org)

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