



Elder Abuse: An Invitation (RSVP)

Re: Older Americans are Hoarding America's Potential – New York Times Guest Essay by Samuel Moyn April 21, 2026 – a response

But it is ageist... This article contains several deeply ageist framings that can normalize harmful attitudes toward older adults and potentially create ideological openings for elder abuse, neglect, and systemic discrimination. Repeatedly portrays older Americans as “hoarding” wealth, jobs, housing, and political power, casting aging itself as a social problem rather than recognizing the diversity of older adults’ circumstances. This broad-brush narrative scapegoats an entire age group.

This is dangerous. When older adults are portrayed as obstacles to progress, it can justify resentment, neglect, or punitive policies rather than protection and support. Elder abuse often thrives in environments where older people are seen as less deserving or burdensome. In fact, 93% of older Americans report experiencing ageism regularly according to the Journal of the American Medical Association. Rather than focusing on structural economic inequalities, the article acts as a dog-whistle pitting younger and older generations against one another by implying older adults are responsible for younger generations’ struggles. Dehumanization and blame enable abuse. Framing older people as competitors or exploiters erodes empathy and encourage social acceptance of exploitation, coercion, or neglect. As if we have not had enough social strife.

But we are living longer... Suggestions such as mandatory retirement, progressive taxation targeting older homeowners, and incentives to force older adults to surrender housing and employment create a framework for stripping autonomy based solely on age. This mirrors patterns seen in financial exploitation and systemic abuse, where older adults’ rights to self-determination are undermined. Policies that reduce autonomy based on age can normalize broader forms of control over older individuals.

Older, richer...? The article treats older Americans largely as a privileged monolith, minimizing the reality that many older adults face poverty, disability, social isolation, cognitive decline, and dependence on protective systems. For decades, the U.S. Census Bureau has consistently reported that millions of older adults are living in or near poverty, especially women and people of color, while the National Council on Aging estimates that over 17 million older adults are economically insecure. In short, most Americans over 62 are not wealthy, though many have accumulated more assets than younger groups due to homeownership and decades of work. A relatively small percentage control a disproportionate share of wealth, while many older adults



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remain economically vulnerable despite public perceptions of widespread elder affluence. This distinction is important because discussions about older Americans as a uniformly wealthy class can obscure major disparities and the continued financial vulnerability of millions of seniors. Oversimplifying older adults as universally powerful obscures those most at risk for abuse. It may weaken public urgency around elder justice, Adult Protective Services, and safeguarding vulnerable seniors.

Is this similar to the dismantling of diversity, equity and inclusion? The repeated assertion that punitive age-based restrictions are “not ageist” normalizes discrimination directed at older people. This attempt to redefine a prejudice to make it socially acceptable erodes what few legal, ethical, and cultural protections exist against elder mistreatment. Once discriminatory treatment is rationalized, abusive practices become easier to justify.

But why does grandpa have all of that money?!... Responsible dialogue about wealth disparity and political representation informed by reliable data and evidence are important, this article’s framing weaponizes age as a category of blame. The Federal Reserve actually shows that wealth differences largely reflect lifecycle accumulation with people building wealth over time and drawing it down in retirement. The true factors of wealth inequality are driven more by the concentration of wealth in the top 1% and structural factors such as wages, housing policy, and education which has been documented by the Brookings Institution. By portraying older adults as overprivileged societal impediments is both wildly inaccurate, dangerously irresponsible and it can reinforce harmful stereotypes, reduce empathy, and create conditions where elder abuse—whether interpersonal, institutional, or systemic—becomes easier to rationalize. Effective policy discussions should address structural inequities without devaluing older adults or undermining their dignity, autonomy, and safety...

...According to reliable sources...:

“In fact, 93% of older Americans report experiencing ageism regularly according to the Journal of the American Medical Association.”

(Allen, J. O., Solway, E., Kirch, M., Singer, D., Kullgren, J. T., Moïse, V., & Malani, P. N. (2022). *Experiences of everyday ageism and the health of older US adults*. *JAMA Network Open*, 5(6), e2217240. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.17240>)

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(National Council on Aging. (2024). *Get the facts on economic security for seniors*. <https://www.ncoa.org/article/get-the-facts-on-economic-security-for-seniors/>)

(U.S. Census Bureau. (2024, June 25). *Majority of older adults in poverty in 2021 lived alone*. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/06/elder-poverty.html>)

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(Bhutta, N., Bricker, J., Chang, A. C., et al. (2020). *Wealth and income concentration in the SCF: 1989–2019*. Federal Reserve Board. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/wealth-and-income-concentration-in-the-scf-20200928.html>)

(Sawhill, I. V., & Pulliam, C. (2019). *Six facts about wealth in the United States*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/six-facts-about-wealth-in-the-united-states/>)

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