THE HAROLD HODGKINSON LECTURE
2018

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Introduction

The Hodgkinson Lecture was established in 2017 in honor of Harold “Bud” Hodgkinson, renowned lecturer, writer, and analyst of demographics and education. “Bud was ahead of his time in anticipating the resegregation of schools, which is now recognized as a major problem,” Kettering Foundation president David Mathews wrote shortly after Hodgkinson’s death in 2016. “And he saw what few did at the time: the relationship between race and economic status. In other works on higher education, Bud contributed what I consider to be the most provocative talk at HEW’s 1976 conference on the changing agenda for higher education. . . . To recognize his contributions to Kettering, we are creating the Hodgkinson Lecture. This lecture will be given to our most distinguished guests to make presentations to our meetings and conferences. It is our way of paying tribute to one of our country’s most insightful, witty, and perceptive scholars.”

The second Hodgkinson Lecturer was delivered by Mark Mather, associate vice president of US programs at the Population Reference Bureau, who has authored more than 40 reports and briefs on US population trends and their implications.

Appearing here are lightly edited versions of the speaker’s remarks, as well as highlights of the ensuing discussion. A brief biography of the speaker appears at the end of this document.
As a research organization concerned with making our democracy work as it should, Kettering has long been concerned with the ability of our political system to reach sound collective decisions, particularly under circumstances of polarization and divisive public discourse. Many of our divisions reflect long-term demographic trends, such as our aging and diversifying population. We invited noted demographer Mark Mather to discuss these trends and their implications for our research particularly as the concern our experimentation with constructive public discourse on these issues. Dr. Mather’s presentation was accompanied by a number of slides graphically illustrating the trends he described.

**Mark Mather:** I did not know Bud Hodgkinson personally, but I understand he was a longtime friend of the organization that I’ve been with for 20 years now, the Population Reference Bureau. And from what I’ve heard, Bud was a leader in the field of focusing on implications of demographics for educational work and social trends that are going on. So, I’m very honored to be here today.

I also am a demographer. What I’m going to focus on today are two really important trends that are going on right now in the United States. The first one is US population aging and the challenges that go along with that. And the second one is growing racial and ethnic diversity.

I want to talk about those two broad trends and then talk a little bit about the intersection between the two, both from a demographic perspective and a little bit from a policy perspective.

So, part one: the United States is growing older. I think everybody knows that. The chart below shows the increase in the number of people ages 65 and older living in the United States. From 1960 to 2060, you can see that there’s a rapid increase in the older population.

Now, we’re at about 50 million people who are 65 and older, but by 2060 that number is expected to increase to 95 million. So, that population is going to nearly double over the next couple of generations. That blue area down below represents the population ages 85 and older. And you can see that number is also expected to increase very rapidly.
You can see from this chart that we’re on the cusp of really rapid population growth for people 65-plus; it’s because those baby boomers are now starting to reach retirement age. By around 2030 and 2040, they’re going to start to reach the older age groups, 85-plus, and we’ll see a surge in the number in that age group.

People often are interested in centenarians and what’s happening with that group. Right now there are about 82,000 people in the United States who are age 100 or older. The census bureau projects that by 2060, there could be as many as 600,000 centenarians.

My grandmother was one of them. She just recently passed away at age 107. As a demographer, I wanted to see how rare that was. I went back to the 2010 census, and it turns out that there were several hundred people who had lived to 105 or older in the State of Pennsylvania. So, it was uncommon, but it’s going to be less uncommon as we add this baby boomer age to the older age groups.

Another way to show age patterns is with population pyramids. And this is a tool that demographers like to use to show the changes in age structure of the population. In the next chart, each horizontal bar represents the number of people in a five-year age category. We’ve got males on the left and females on the right. And this is the population age pyramid for the US in 1970. The baby boomer generation were youngsters back then. They were in that 5-to-24 age group. I was born actually just a little bit too late, so I’m in
that bar below the baby boomers. But you can see this population pyramid is really a young age structure: many young people at the bottom and fewer older adults at the top.

Fast-forward to 2016, and you can see the dramatic shift in the age structure of the population. These are the baby boomers now in the 50 to 69 age group. That’s the mouse that’s going through the snake.
Note that little bump in the 20-to-34 age category. Those are the so-called echo-boomers, the children of baby boomers. And we heard about them recently because they were flooding our high schools and now our colleges.

And now fast-forward again to 2030, and you can see that the age distribution’s getting a little bit top heavy. It’s less of a pyramid and more of a rectangle. The US really looks a lot more like what you’d see if you were able to look at many countries in Europe. The US age distribution is really starting to take on patterns of many other developed countries that have been further ahead than the US in terms of the aging of the population.
The next chart shows the US age distribution in another way. Those bars at the top represent the percent of the population ages 65-plus, and then there’s a middle category that’s the working-age population. The blue bar at the bottom is the percent of the population under age 18. So, back in 1960, we were really a child-centered society with 36 percent under age 18. Here we are in 2016, with 23 percent of the population under 18, and 15 percent 65 and older.

By 2030, you can see that the number of kids and the number of older adults is roughly equal at about 21 percent. And many people don’t realize that given the aging of the population, it won’t be until 2030 that the number of kids is projected to fall below the number of people ages 65-plus. It’s going to take some time.

What this means is that there are many fewer working-age adults for each person ages 65 and older. This is what we call the elderly support ratio. As can be seen on the next chart, back in 1960, that ratio was about 6-to-1. We are now at about 4. By 2030 it will drop to 3, and by 2060 it’s expected to be about a 2-to-1 ratio.

Now a lot of people would tell you that the elderly support ratio is not the best measure. It’s a little bit out of date in that you can’t expect many 18-year-olds to be joining the workforce. Increasingly, they, especially women, are delaying labor force participation to go to college.
And then in the older age group, there are many more adults who are staying in the workforce. So, really that working-age population is kind of shifting its way up the age distribution over time.

Those are some of the key national trends. But many local areas are already there. They already look like what we’re predicting at the national level in the next generation. In Florida right now, about 20 percent of the population is 65 and older. But in about a third of all US counties, we’re already at the point where 20 percent of the population is 65 and older. So, many local areas are already experiencing rapid population aging and trying to figure out policy solutions to problems such as health care.

I grew up in rural Pennsylvania, and it provides a good example of what’s happening in many rural areas across the country. When I was a kid, there were lots of kids on my street, and we’d all go to the bus stop in the morning. My mom still lives in the same house where I grew up. But there are no more kids in the neighborhood. Young families are leaving Pennsylvania—at least rural Pennsylvania—to go to school or to find better jobs. It’s a phenomenon that we’ve seen, especially in parts of the Midwest where population aging is not a result of older people moving in, as you’d see in parts of Florida, but rather it’s young people moving out. And people who are left behind tend to be the older adults.

Why should we care about population aging? Well, obviously, Social Security and Medicare are the subjects we hear about most often from policymakers. And indeed, by 2050, Social Security and Medicare expenditures are projected to reach about 12

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### Social Security and Medicare Expenditures Are Projected to Reach 12% of GDP by 2050.

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Source: A Summary of the 2016 Annual Social Security and Medicare Trust Fund Reports.

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percent of gross domestic product, so it’s certainly a big concern. If we’re going to be putting that much money into entitlement programs, there are going to have to be some tradeoffs and compromises in terms of funding for other programs.

But there are a few other trends that I want to talk about that are not discussed in the news as much. One is the increase in people who are living with chronic diseases.

This is kind of a good news/bad news story. The good news is that over the past several decades, we’ve had longer life expectancies in the United States. That hasn’t been true for the last couple of years, especially with what’s happening with the opioid epidemic. But in general, we’ve seen longer life expectancies and declines in severe disabilities with advances in health-care technologies and medical care.

At the same time, many older adults are at risk of chronic disease and premature death, and this has often been linked to trends in smoking, obesity, and alcohol use, and it’s also linked to socioeconomic status. Those who have less education, lower-income families, are more likely to experience these chronic diseases than are higher-income groups.

You’ve heard about rising obesity rates. This next chart shows you the trends in obesity for the older population. The four bars on the left-hand side are obesity rates for various gender and age groups about 20 years ago. And the bars on the right-hand side show you the trends for the most recent data available.
Just as an example, for men ages 75-plus, the share who are obese has increased from about 13 percent in the late 1980s and early 1990s to more than 27 percent a few years ago. It’s more than doubled over a generation.

We’re also seeing a rapid increase in the number of people who are living with dementia, most commonly Alzheimer’s disease. It currently affects about one in four people over age 80 in the United States. One in three unpaid caregivers in the US are helping someone with dementia. And those unpaid caregivers are providing six billion hours of unpaid care every year. So, in a way, caregivers—and it’s most often daughters caring for their elderly parents—are propping up the health-care system by providing all this unpaid care. If you count all the hours of care being provided, dementia is the costliest health issue in the United States at about 215 billion dollars per year. And it’s projected that those costs could more than double by 2040.

There’s another trend that has failed to receive a lot of attention, which also has implications for both the older population and caregiving, and current changes we’re seeing in family structure.

We’ve had relatively high rates of divorce in this country. There’s a relatively high share of unmarried cohabiting couples, and nonmarital childbearing has increased over time so that right now about 40 percent of all children are born outside of marriage, often to cohabiting couples.
At the same time, we’ve had lower fertility in the United States. Right now, we’re at about 1.8 children per woman, which is not an historic low. But again, it’s bringing the United States closer to some of the patterns we’re seeing in parts of Europe. And then we’re seeing an increase in so-called blended families. That’s where a couple has children living in the same household, but the children are from previous relationships.

These trends are important because these changes in family structure could affect the bonds between children and their parents. The question is whether kids will form strong enough bonds with their parents to be willing to provide all the caregiving support that will be needed.

The chart below shows trends in family structure over time. The blue bars at the bottom are the share of households comprised of married couples with children. That share has dropped from about 44 percent in 1960 to 20 percent in 2016.

The green bars posted at the top represent the share of the population living alone, which has doubled since 1960. An erosion of the family may be part of the story, but it’s also the fact that we’re compressing the time that people are spending with children,
partly because people are having kids later in life; they’re often waiting until they’re in their late 20s or 30s.

And then, once kids leave the nest, people are living much longer. It’s not uncommon now for older adults to spend 30 or 40 years living in households without any kids.

I mentioned that the share of people living alone has increased. The next chart breaks down the proportion who are living alone into different age groups. Although many young adults live alone, there are still only 5 percent of 18- to-24-year-olds living alone. It’s usually not an option for economic reasons for these young people. It is mostly older adults—especially women ages 75 and older—who are living alone. In 2017, 45 percent of older women ages 75 and older were living alone.

Okay, so now that I’ve depressed you all, I’m going to shift gears. This is part two, focused on growing racial/ethnic diversity in the United States.

If current trends continue, somewhere around the year 2045 the United States will likely become “majority minority.” That’s when whites will make up less than half of the population. You can see the blue bars on the chart below. That’s the share of non-Hispanic whites in the population. It shows a decline from about 80 percent back in 1980
to 56 percent in 2030. At the same time, we’ve seen a fairly rapid increase in the share of the population that’s Hispanic or Latino.

If you look at the same chart for population under age 18, you can see that children are on a much faster trajectory toward that majority minority status. By 2020 over half the population under age 18 is projected to be minority. Right now about 51 percent of the child population is non-Hispanic white, but it’s going to take just a few more years for that to drop below 50 percent. The increase in diversity that we’re seeing is really happening from the bottom up. It’s starting with kids and youth, and working its way up through the age distribution.

So now let’s combine these two trends—the aging of the population and this growth in racial/ethnic diversity that we’re seeing, especially among youth. These two parallel trends have resulted in a racial/ethnic divide that’s defined by generations in the United States.

The next chart shows you, for both 1960 and the present, the share of different age groups that are racial or ethnic minorities. And you can see that in 1960 there wasn’t that big a gap between different generations or cohorts. About 9 percent of older adults in
2016 were racial/ethnic minorities compared with about 18 percent of youth under age 20.

In 2016 you can see that there’s a very wide difference in the racial/ethnic makeup of these groups. Now close to half of all young adults and children are members of racial ethnic minorities, while the share is much lower for older adults.

So how did we get to this point today? We are at a unique point in history. The year 1965 was significant (demographically speaking). First, that year marked the end of the baby boom. Baby boomers were born from 1946 to 1964. These were mostly white babies being born during that period. And second, starting in 1965, we saw a precipitous decline in fertility rates.

The mid-1960s was also a time when we started to see the relaxation of immigration laws, and consequently, much more rapid rates of immigration to the United States. If you put those two trends together, that really puts us where we are today with an aging white population and a younger population that is more racially and ethnically diverse, and made up of a large number of children of immigrants.

Earlier, I showed you population pyramids of the total United States. The next chart is a population pyramid of the non-Hispanic white population in the United States.
You can clearly see the baby boom generation there at the top. But if you look at the base, you can also see that it’s actually narrowing. So each age group is smaller than the last. We’re seeing a decline over time in the number of non-Hispanic white children because of the aging of the white population.

The population pyramid for the Latino population looks very different, as can be seen on the chart below. And people will often point to fertility as the factor that’s driving this. It’s really true that for many years, Latinos did have higher fertility rates, but that’s really not what’s driving most of the population increases for Latinos. It’s the fact that when you’ve got migrants coming into the country who tend to be of reproductive age, it generates a lot of population momentum so lots of babies are being born. It keeps the population younger.
I know there are lots of debates about building a wall on our border with Mexico, but that would have no effect on the shape of this population pyramid. This trend is kind of baked-in right now. And regardless of what policies you have, it would take many, many years to change the age distribution of the population.

So why does this matter? Well, in addition to the racial/ethnic gaps that I just outlined, there are wide economic gaps between age groups, as shown in the next chart.
Since 1974, child poverty rates have exceeded the poverty rates for older Americans. The blue line there is the poverty rate for kids, and you can see it’s right where it was back in 1966 at 18 percent. I know there are lots of issues with the official poverty measure. But the fact is it’s correlated with lots of other bad outcomes for kids. Whether it’s a good measure or not, it’s associated with many other bad outcomes. We know that it matters in some important ways.

And because of the expansion of Social Security benefits back in the 1960s and 1970s, the poverty rate for older Americans declined from close to 30 percent down to 9 percent where it is today.

Among children, it’s members of racial/ethnic minorities that are the most vulnerable. I don’t have data for all of the racial/ethnic groups here because of sample-size limitations in the Current Population Survey, but on the next chart, you can see the wide gaps in child poverty rates. Close to a third of African-American children and 27 percent of Latino youth live in poverty, compared with 11 percent of non-Hispanic white children.
So, by way of summary: Baby boomers are starting to reach retirement age. We’re seeing changes in family structure that could create a caregiving gap down the road. We’re seeing a rapid increase in the number and share of racial ethnic minorities in the population. As I said, it’s a unique period in history during which we have older white baby boomers in juxtaposition with youth who are increasingly Latino and Asian-American and multiracial.

I’ve talked about this on a national scale, but it’s playing out in many local communities in interesting ways across the country as well. Hazelton, Pennsylvania, is a good example. There is a *New York Times* article about what’s happening in Hazelton, where the share of the immigrant population increased from about 5 percent in 2010 to 50 percent today.

So, we see that juxtaposition of people who grew up in Hazelton and still live there, mostly white folks, in contrast with a growing number of people who don’t look like them and some of the conflicts that can arise—the cultural issues that can arise—from that contrast. In fact, one-fourth of all US children today have at least one parent who is foreign-born, and that number has increased over time.
There are major policy challenges associated with these trends—again, Social Security and Medicare are the big ones. We have to think about providing care to the growing number of older adults with chronic illnesses and dementia. And we have to figure out how to balance the competing needs of older adults and the needs of young families.

As I mentioned, kids are still going to outnumber older people in 2030. And the fact that we still have these persistent gaps in poverty rates between kids and older adults doesn’t really bode too well for the future, given that some of the most vulnerable groups are also the fastest-growing.

So, the question in my mind is whether aging baby boomers who are mostly white will support programs for vulnerable children and families who may not look like them, who come from a different culture and have a different background.

I think the key here is to view this increasing racial/ethnic diversity as an opportunity. Immigration has really kept the United States young relative to other developed countries. I didn’t put up a population pyramid for Japan, but Japan is the oldest country in the world. If you were to look at their age distribution you’d find that it looks like an inverted pyramid. They’re facing a declining population. And if trends continue, by 2300, there will be zero people living in Japan. Not that that will happen, but based on current trends, it is theoretically possible.

Immigrants and their children can help offset the cost of an aging society. They can replace aging baby boomers in the workforce. They can improve the long-term outlook for entitlement programs. They can provide caregiving assistance to older adults with chronic illnesses and disabilities.

But in order to make all of that work, we need to provide youth, young families, and children with the resources they need to become productive adults. And I think that’s where one of my main concerns is. It’s almost a perfect storm: so many children who are struggling to do well in school, which is going to translate into poor labor force outcomes. And this is happening to some of the fastest-growing groups in our population. It’s not clear whether they’re going to be able to succeed and whether we’re going to be able to take advantage of all of this demographic potential.

**Highlights of the Discussion**

**Tendai Murisa:** Thank you very much. Quite revealing. So I’ll speak as an outsider looking into America, just raising some questions. . . . First, I wanted to ask: What is the contribution of these immigrants in terms of taxes? Because one of the arguments I’ve heard is that they do not contribute significantly toward the tax base. And
number two, how many generations does it take an immigrant family to move from renting a house to possessing the house that then is passed on? Because this is the key to American accumulation. Are we seeing immigrants replicating those patterns?

**Mark Mather:** As I mentioned at the beginning, there are competing research studies on the contributions of immigrants to the economy. I don’t think that they’re a drain to the extent that some people have indicated in terms of not contributing any taxes and participating in welfare programs. In many cases, they’re not eligible to participate in welfare programs. And they are contributing a lot in taxes. I couldn’t give you an exact number to how much that is.

In terms of the generations, second generations do better than first generations, and third generations do better than second generations. But, to a large extent, it depends on the circumstances. It can take quite a while, in some cases, because parents who are working in very low-income jobs don’t have many health benefits. Their children are also going to be struggling to do well in school. They’re going to be living in poor communities. And so some of these issues can get transmitted from one generation to the next, but the fact that second-generation kids are probably going to be speaking English suggests that they do tend to do better in many ways.

Things can actually get worse in second and third generations. We’ve seen that in some communities in terms of health outcomes where obesity rates increase over time. So, it depends on which indicators you look at, but I think economically you will tend to see a trajectory that looks better over time.

**Keith Melville:** . . . Here’s what interests me, and that is this intersection of the two groups in the population that are most dependent on public funding – the young—particularly the impoverished young—and the elderly. And I’m thinking that one of the dilemmas the democratic nations have is they’re short-term-oriented in their policies. And thinking about this in a certain way, it’s a collision course or at least a competition for public resources. . . .

The whole question of intergenerational justice doesn’t get discussed very often. What does each generation owe to the next? And I wonder if that’s something that in the various efforts that we make in the network that we work with might be a very important issue to begin to highlight in certain ways as a matter of public discussion. What do you think are some of the implications here in terms of what the public needs to be thinking about regarding this perfect storm?

**Mark Mather:** I think one of the challenges that we’re having is that I talked about these trends broadly. But the way these play out geographically and socially is that there’s a disconnect between generations so that people are living in separate spheres.
Older adults might view younger, racial and ethnic minorities living in inner cities as not their problem, not something that they have to think about. . .

But there are lots of hidden costs associated with the failure of young adults and their kids to succeed. They’re not going to be contributing as much in the labor force. They’re not going to be paying as much in taxes. They’re going to develop premature health issues. Of direct impact on older adults is the fact that they’re not going to have the support they need for Social Security, Medicare, and caregiving. We need a new social contract between those two groups because they really are mutually dependent. . .

Brad Rourke: I was struck by what I think is an embedded assumption that you see, especially in the stacked bar graphs that separate human life into ages 4 to 18, 18 to 64, and then 65 to death.

And the assumption appears to be that the 18-to-64 window is the time of production, that pre-18 is the time of receiving, and that post-65 is also a time of receiving and lack of production.

But we know, and you alluded to it, that the new 18 appears to be something like 24. And the new 65 may be something like 75. The productivity time has shifted. One of those appears to have to do with concrete factors—ability to continue to be productive later. Another appears to have to do with social factors—the idea that you’re not ready to work until you’re 24.

Is there any move to begin to think about that productive period as different? Because one response to the potential cultural and economic gaps that you described could be to move 24 back to 18 but keep 65 at 75 so the time of production is much greater. I’m wondering if there’s serious thought being given by demographers to shifting that framework. Are there people talking about it?

Mark Mather: There definitely are. We still have these fairly arbitrary age cutoffs, but obviously there’s recognition that more and more people are working past the age of 65. . . . That’s certainly one of the potential solutions for a lot of the issues that we’re seeing with entitlement programs. So how much could they reduce the potential impact on Social Security if the people who could continue to work past 65 were to do so? It’s an important question. As for the younger age groups, it’s really not realistic to think that many people are going to be able to be self-sufficient at age 18. You need a college degree or at least some kind of technical degree in order to earn a good living.

David Holwerk: . . . What you had to say I think has a particular relevance to one particular thing that Kettering does. . . . At Public Voice this past year, when we had people talk about the divisions in the country, one of the first things that emerged from the list of things policymakers were concerned about was age division, which struck me
because we’ve tended to pass over age division. . . . For one thing, you’re talking about the question of whether aging baby boomers are people that support schooling and social services for immigrant children. But the other side of that is, as [these children] grow into the workforce, would they be willing to support Social Security and Medicare?

First, I thought Kettering ought to redo the Social Security issue book to see whether that social contract is still viable. But it draws attention to the fact that our forums tend to be whiter than the general population, older than the population, and more educated than the population. And so, to get a clear reading of that, we’re going to have to put more effort into how we run these forums, where we run them, who runs them, and the places where we hold them.

**Randy Nielson:** I’m intrigued with the challenge of naming the categories. I was thinking about the difference between the two parts of the analysis there, one where the category is age, and the other where the category is attempting to name ethnicity and race and so on. . . . Forty or 50 years ago where I grew up in Wisconsin, there were communities of people that were Danish. And they distinguished themselves, even from the Swedes. . . . This guy came from a Catholic Irish family, and this woman came from the Dutch. Those categories were there. They seem to be less there now, which means that when you do time-series analyses, it becomes increasingly difficult to name the categories because the nature of the category changes. . . .

What it means to be 65 has changed. But still you can say people are 50 or 60 years old and that’s clear. . . . But isn’t multiethnic/multiracial the natural pattern over time? And if so, don’t the defining category names become increasingly meaningless? In other words, it’s hard to compare 1930 with 2030 because increasingly the people are indeed multietnich/multiracial. . . . So, is there a difference between how you can think about the age part of your analysis and the ethnicity/race part?

**Mark Mather:** That’s an extremely useful question that I think the census bureau struggles with on a daily basis. The race question in the census has changed in every census since 1970. It’s changing again now. And you’re right that the increase in multiracial/multiethnic groups really makes it challenging to look at trends over time. And in some ways it makes these long-term projections a little suspect. . . . From my perspective, the only reason they’re useful is that they do point to persistent disparities between groups. When we categorize people this way, we can see the gaps in the poverty rates and we can see voting rights issues and all the other reasons that we collect these data and identify vulnerable minority populations.

**Jean Johnson:** Your presentation was really fascinating and points to the coming policy and political dilemma about whether aging baby boomers support the kinds of social programs needed to tackle higher rates of poverty among younger people. . . . But
the other thing I was wondering, as I watched your presentation, is whether I saw the recipe for increasing elderly poverty as well. This huge group of people is living longer. They may outlive whatever savings they have. . . . And then I think about what it would mean for the public discussion of economic fairness if, in fact, poverty was not in one group, but rather affected a number of different segments of the population in different ways and whether we ought to talk about it in a more open way as opposed to one age group versus the other. So that’s a question.

**Mark Mather:** Yes. I think that there are real concerns about whether older adults in the next generation will be doing as well as the current generation of older adults. . . . We’re seeing, especially for those who don’t have college degrees, increasing health issues and no savings for retirement. They are also the groups that are more likely to live in these complex family living arrangements in which they may not have the same support networks that others do. There are real concerns that people are not at all well prepared for retirement, and that issue can worsen over time if younger adults don’t help them succeed.

**John McKnight:** In the 1950s, columnist Dorothy Thompson wrote a wonderful column in which she suggested that the “glue” that held together Americans from different cultures was the “democratic ideal.” A long time has passed since the column, and I’m not sure she’s right. I think what’s held us together is the emergence of a consumer society. It has been the most powerful force in terms of shaping our culture and present politics.

So what I’m wondering about is how deeply embedded in the consumer culture we are. And what does this demographic that you’re talking about change? . . . If, in the future, the majority of the people are minority and occupy the bottom of the economic ladder, the fact that they are politically a majority will probably have some consequence on how we distribute public wealth. So, you can see these trends working out in such a way that it would still be a consumer society, but our production would be very different.

**Mark Mather:** This seems like more of a question for the long-term—what could happen next generation or two generations from now. I do think it might go back to some of the questions around what’s happening with racial/ethnic categories and identification. At some point, categories are going to become more meaningless. And I think it could be that it will be less about racial/ethnic divides and more about socio-economic divides. . . .

**Paula Ellis:** . . . I was raised in Northwestern where every professor I ever met said, “Honey, by the time you get there, there’s going to be nothing. So you better save your pennies because you’re not going to have a pension. You’re not going to have Social Security.” . . . And so here it is again. I guess my question is Can you help guide us with
your data to the most highly leveraged intervention points in these systems . . . to a policy arena in which you would no longer continue to kick the can down the road?

Mark Mather: . . . My view is that we need to tackle these issues head-on and early. There’s lots of research showing that early childhood education is critical to put kids on a path to success. The level and amount of funding that we’re providing through transfer payments is still a relatively small piece of the federal budget.

I know there are lots of state and local funds also going towards these programs. But I think there’s room there to provide additional support, especially for young children to make sure they’re getting a good start, which really can help them succeed in school and, later on, getting jobs. So, that means providing adequate funding for affordable, high-quality childcare and headstart programs, and making sure that kids by third grade are in a good position to do well in school. . . .

Melinda Gilmore: . . . I was particularly interested in your comments on the care for older adults and the heavier burden that seems to fall on the shoulders of women. . . . And I’m wondering what it means for democracy when much of this burden seems to fall on only half of the population. And I’m also wondering if, as you suggested, family bonds decrease over time, then the role of caregiver that has historically fallen on women will be shrugged off, meaning that other solutions will need to be found. . . .

All of this also made me think back to our January retreat at which we brainstormed potential problems for future deliberation. There were a few threads that had something to do with family or work-life balance, but we didn’t quite know what to make of them. Your presentation today helped me begin to frame some notions around what it might mean for us to think through some sort of issue framing that would help others begin to wrestle with this because I think this is a problem not just for women, but for all members of the population.

Mark Mather: It’s an extremely good point, and I think everyone has personal experiences in some way with this type of caregiving. . . . But the fact that more women are in the workforce is going to create lots of challenges. We hear about the sandwich generation. In some cases, we’ve got those 24-year-olds who might still be living at home, and then an elderly parent for whom they’re also providing care. So it’s a very important issue. And for families who live in these complex living arrangements, it becomes a real issue. . . .

Wanda Minor: . . . There needs to be some sort of way by which caregivers are at least compensated because many of them have to give up their careers in order to go back home and help mom and dad and auntie survive. So, what is the government role in coming up with financial things to help those people who have to leave their jobs to come home and help? And that’s huge in rural areas. A whole generation of baby boomers have
had to come back home and take care of their parents and relatives without compensation. And then when [their parents] pass, there’s nothing for them.

**Laura Rusch:** . . . Do you have data on how many elderly people are living with married couples with children or with a working adult without children? How many people are experiencing that now as opposed to how many elderly people are living alone—which really gives me pause now that I know what dementia is like.

**Mark Mather:** Well, I don’t have numbers at the top of my mind, but the majority of older adults are living independently, which is a positive trend in that people are generally healthier than they used to be. And because of improvements in system devices and medical care, people can live in their homes much longer than they could in the last generation, so that’s the good news. In terms of people who have chronic issues, such as dementia, . . . obviously, they’re going to either have to have someone living with them or be in an assisted-living facility of some sort or have some other arrangement.

**Concluding Remarks**

**David Mathews:** . . . Just this final note about this very good discussion. We can’t do anything about demography, but we can do something about the issues. We can’t select the issues sitting around you. . . . The people who hold the forums identify the issues. But we can talk to them about what kinds of issues might be coming. And the implication and benefit of this presentation that Mark made is that it causes us to think about what the issues are.

I think we need a group to sit and look at this analysis, and see what kind of issues come out of it. It’s clear from our discussion that one of them has to do with care for aging parents and people with disabilities, but there are a lot of others. And John Dedrick, who is our organizer, might want to look to see whether we need a special follow-up group to look at this or whether Brad and the College of Deliberative Politics does this sort of thing regularly. Great discussion, Mark. Thank you.

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

Mark Mather is associate vice president of US Programs at the Population Reference Bureau and has 20 years of experience communicating population research to advocacy groups, educators, journalists, and the public. He has authored more than 40 reports and briefs on US population trends and their implications, specializing in issues related to child, family, and elderly well-being. He also works in partnership with Census Bureau staff on several projects to increase knowledge and use of American Community Survey data. Dr. Mather’s research is frequently cited by the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. He holds a PhD and MA in
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