

## In Truth, 60 Is the New 60 By Marc Freedman

**B**y now the story is familiar. A gray wave of aging boomers is crossing into their 60s, hitting retirement age, morphing suddenly into senior citizens, and bringing with them a new era of demographically determined dependency and despair. We're trading baby strollers for walkers and wheelchairs.

Don't believe it. The sixty-somethings headed our way will invent an entirely new stage of life—the encore years—between the end of middle adulthood and anything resembling old age and retirement. We brand them the young-old, or the working-retired. Or maybe just the oxymoronic years.

On one hand, these new-stagers are implored to hang on to their fast-fading youth—60 is the new 40, we're told. On the other, my pharmacy offers a “senior discount” to anyone over 60. It's either clinging to lost youth or accepting premature aging.

In truth, 60 is not the new 30 any more than it is the new 90. It's the new 60. Indeed, the whole 60- to 80-year-old period is simply new territory, and the people in this period constitute a whole new phenomenon in the 21st century.

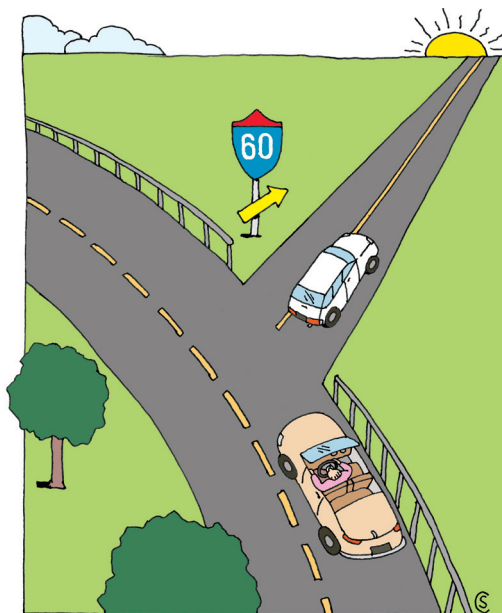
To be sure, inventing phases of life is anything but new. A century ago there was no adolescence. Look farther back and childhood barely existed. Retirement as we know it is a concoction of the post-World War II period.

With close to 10,000 women and men a day turning 60, it's high time to accelerate the social construction project that is the encore years. That starts with embracing this time as a unique period of life. Most of all it means innovation.

How about inventing a gap year for grown-ups, a time when they could take a break, volunteer at home or abroad, or try a new career direction? A gap year—perhaps financed by a new tax-exempt savings vehicle we could call the Individual Purpose Account—could be a source of renewal for those embarking on a new career chapter.

What about midlife fellowships for those seeking new roles combining

**We can make a monument out of what so many think of as the leftover years.**



purpose with a paycheck? And why stop there: Let's rethink our entire education system? Why cram so much learning into our teens and early 20s when we may want to move in a whole new direction in our 50s, 60s and 70s?

By capitalizing on the unique assets of this vast population, we can make a monument out of what so many think of as the leftover years. If we develop the right public policies, we

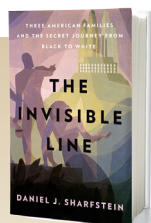
might create a new chance for social mobility in the process.

There's much at stake here. Today's pioneers are simply the first wave of people passing into this new period, which will soon be occupied by their longer-living children and grandchildren.

Even more fundamentally, we can change the shape of American lives. In crafting this new phase, we'll inevitably revamp the nature of all the preceding life stages, opening up options for younger people who can make life decisions with the expectation of more than one bite at the apple.

That's why we all have a stake in this project. It's our chance to turn the purported paradox of longevity—good for individuals, terrible for society—into a vast payoff for all generations today and tomorrow. □

**Freedman** is author of *The Big Shift: Navigating the New Stage Beyond Midlife*, to be published by PublicAffairs ([www.encore.org/thebigshift](http://www.encore.org/thebigshift)).



### ■ The Invisible Line By Daniel J. Sharfstein

From the colonial era to the present, individuals with African ancestry have crossed the color line. They have lived among white people, identified themselves as white, and been regarded by others as white. In recent years, however, long-buried stories of migration and assimilation across the color line

have surfaced. Millions of Americans are swabbing their cheeks, watching television shows about celebrity genealogies and posting family trees on ancestry websites. The Internet has enabled people to learn of ancestors and genealogical facts: age, place of residence, occupation, a designation of “mulatto.” They have also found clues for un-

derstanding how individuals and communities lived and acted. With every personal account that is recovered, a new history of what it means to be American is revealed.

—From **The Invisible Line: Three American Families and the Secret Journey From Black to White.**