

Gi bill of 1944



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A Building Block for the Future: The G. I. Bill of 1944 “ We’re finally home boys! ” shouted one of the young invigorated soldiers as the plane landed on the runway. The young men arriving from the European and Japanese fronts were filled with excitement but among them there resonated a feeling of unknown. World War II had finally come to a conclusion and what the future held for many young men in the middle of the 1940’s was completely unknown. The only feeling of security that the soldiers returning home was the feeling of winning.

The feeling of satisfaction persisted among the American soldiers that they had avenged the tragedy of Pearl Harbor. The same feeling of satisfaction existed on the European front as they had helped the other European powers stop the Fascist Nazi’s. Among the men there was a contagious energy in which many had never had the opportunity to experience in many of their lifetimes. These men and women had just accomplished one of the most incredible feats of the twentieth century and it was now time for them to return to America and start the rest of their lives.

Most of the soldiers involved in the war grew up during the Great Depression of the 1930’s and had never known anything that resembled a comfortable lifestyle. As soldiers returned home from the Pacific and European fronts many questions arose about what their futures would hold. Among many Americans there was a general fear that the economy would return to its pre-war state in which people were starving and the unemployment rate was at an all-time high. Most believed that the war was responsible for the economic turnaround that had occurred in America due to the influx of money spent by the U.

S. government for an arms buildup. This build up of arms provided many jobs to women and non-white races that had not had the opportunity to find a job before the war but the question that persisted was were these men going to return to work and put these people back on the streets? Many questions lingered in Americans minds, but a question that stood out for many Americans at this time was with the war effort now over and production down will America again fall into the deep depths of the depression?

This question was answered with the passing of a bill and the pen of Franklin Roosevelt on May 19, 1944 when the American government made a down payment for their future. When President Roosevelt signed the Readjustment Act he was betting on the returning soldiers to have a lasting impact on America; the soldiers would not disappoint as many men used the bill to brighten their futures and in doing so made America a stronger nation. The G. I. Bill influenced America in many different ways in which all had positive effects.

First, when soldiers returned home from the European and Pacific fronts many were still trying to get the horrific images that they had to endure out of their heads. Not only did many experience the loss of many of their closest comrades, but many were trying to overcome the symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. The G. I. Bill offered financial aid for a year that would allow those soldiers that were struggling psychologically. These men were struggling with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder either could not find a job or didn't have the ability to initially work after the war.

The bill provided reasonable unemployment allowances that were payable each week for up to a maximum period of a year. As a result of the Great

Depression and pre-war America the state of the economy was of utmost importance to President Roosevelt. He and the rest of the political leaders of America knew something needed to be done to create new jobs and stimulate spending. The leaders also knew that something had to be done to protect the future of the returning soldiers as such a large group of young men were returning home. Roosevelt's core idea of the G. I. bill is exhibited by Altschuler when he writes, " To Roosevelt, this was neither educational opportunity nor government-guaranteed residential loans but the successful transitions of millions of veterans from military service to civilian work. He singled out ' satisfactory employment' as the most urgent need of service personnel and concluded the GI Bill would help that need. " Not only were the returning soldiers fearful of a return to the Great Depression, but clearly our political leaders were fearful represented by Roosevelt's urgent need to stimulate jobs.

Another portion of the G. I. Bill that had a considerable positive effect on the American economy was the government establishing provisions for the returning soldiers for fifty percent of certain loans made to them. These loans to the soldiers could be used for the purchase or construction of homes, farms, and business properties. This part of the act made it easier for entrepreneurs to try to start their own businesses resulting in a swelling in the number of small business in the 1950's and 1960's. Not only did the G.

I. Bill have a lasting effect on small businesses but also it transformed the way Americans lived in the cities. As veterans received the financial benefits from the G. I. Bill and began to make their way into higher paying jobs a housing boom occurred and suburbs began to quickly develop. The housing

boom of the 1950's affected not only the people that were living at this time, but the lifestyle of Americans forever. No longer was the middle class of America only relegated to living within the cities.

With the housing boom of the 1950's as well as the development of mass production of vehicles people could now live in the Suburbs and commute to their jobs in the cities. Vehicles before the 1950's had been mass produced, but the difference between the 1950's and before is the amount of people being able to afford vehicles increased drastically in the 1950's. People could now afford to buy vehicles as a result of the education or benefits that they had received from the government years before due to their service during World War II.

During the 1940's and the ten years following the development of housing communities increased rapidly. According to Altschuler, who used the 1970 U. S. Census report writes, " the rapid movement of big-city dwellers to new homes outside the central city increased that proportion to 41 percent and in the 1950's it grew again to 49 percent. Major cities did see growth at this time just not at the same rate. Sometimes during the early 1960, the area outside the nation's largest cities surpassed these cities in population, and the balance has continued to shift. People at this point were establishing a pattern that is still followed in today's society of living out in the suburbs and commuting to the city for work. After the invention of the suburbs there was a need for better roads at the middle of the 1950's. President Eisenhower firmly believed America needed to modernize their roads in the form of an Interstate system that would be globally unrivaled. Eisenhower wanted a roads system that was even unrivaled by the Germans which is saying

something because in the 1930's there interstate system gave them a distinct advantage during the second war.

Eisenhower believed a National Interstate System was essential to the United States not only as a result of the suburbs but also militarily. Eisenhower is quoted as saying, " together the uniting forces of our communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear- without them we would be an alliance of separate parts. " Once the Interstate system was created the majority of America's middle class was now living in the suburbs and a large percentage of the middle class that were building houses out in the suburbs were recipients of the G.

I. Bill. The Bill transformed cities and it also provided a foundation for an increase in birth rates as a result of families being secure financially. The G. I. Bill along with families settling down in the suburbs are two major reasons for the large increase birth rates of the 1950's and 1960's and the Baby Boomer Generation. Even today, the period of the Baby Boomers in the 1950's and 60's is unrivaled when comparing birth rates during different times. Creation of jobs through great loan rates and unemployment are very important portions of the G. I. bill, but what helped to lay the groundwork for America more than anything was the financial aid that was offered for the returning soldiers to attend college. The bill stated the returning soldiers had access to tuition charges of up to \$500 per school year; furthermore, the right to receive a monthly living allowance while pursuing their studies at universities. The school portion of the Readjustment Act created something many soldiers would have never had access to: the opportunity to rise to a higher socioeconomic status level as a result of a college degree.

This opportunity is exemplified by Private Leslie Faulk and his incredible story. If it weren't for the G. I Bill Mr. Faulk would most likely have returned home from Europe and would have come home to work in his native smoky western Pennsylvania industrial town where the days of the Great Depression were still apparent. Kiester writes, " Then he would look for work. If he were very lucky, he would move up from his high school occupations of caddying at the local golf course and racking balls in Kindler's poolroom.

Maybe he'd even find what the town considered a " good job. " That meant he might be stoking a steel-mill open-hearth furnace or winding copper armatures in the Westinghouse generator plant. " However, with the opportunity that America granted Leslie he had the opportunity to go pursuit a college education and eventually become an engineer for the United States military leaving the western Pennsylvania town behind. Thanks to the government's aid Leslie along with hundreds of thousands of soldiers now had the opportunity to become an engineer, lawyer, or even a doctor.

Before the Readjustment Act of 1944 someone that was from the lower class never even had the option to attend a university or trade school because to them it was just too expensive. For this reason of creating opportunity to a class of people that had never had such opportunity the G. I. Bill is one of the most significant pieces of legislation in American history. Kiester believes that there were two periods in American history when expanding education has eventually resulted in an economic gain for the United States.

The two periods in which education has worked to expand the economy are the Land Grant for colleges of 1860 and the period of the G. I. Bill. He asserts, " G. I. Bill statistics are awesome. Out of 14 million eligibles, 2. 2

million veterans jumped at the chance to attend college. At a cost of \$5.5 billion, the first G. I. Bill turned out 450,000 engineers, 240,000 accountants, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 122,000 dentists, 17,000 writers and editors, and thousands of other professionals. " As these professionals entered the American workforce the impact was immediate, and it was a substantial impact.

The more successful the G. I. graduates were the more of a return the America government had as a result of the taxes that these people would pay into the government for many decades to come. Ironically, the returning veterans had better access to the more prestigious schools which contributes largely to the high number of engineers, doctors, and dentists. According to statistics taken by the U. S. Office of Higher Education in 1948, " With tuition paid by the government, veterans attempted to enter the best institutions their records would permit.

In the fall of 1948 the majority of veteran men enrolled in privately controlled institution, while the majority of nonveteran students registered at publically controlled institutions. " This represents that returning soldiers were drawn to better known institutions and since the government was granting them a healthy sum of money for their schooling they could afford the best schools in the country. Those who opposed legislation of the Readjustment Act of 1944 feared that passing the bill would be another step in Roosevelt's New Deal policy.

Many right wing conservatives objected at the idea believing that the origins of the bill arose from liberal ideologies. Liberals responded with their argument claiming the different nuances of the Readjustment act which

included: compensation education and training benefits were designed in no measure to breathe new life into the New Deal. Liberals go on to make the point that the Readjustment Act of 1944 was put in place for one reason only and that was to mitigate the effects of a postwar depression or recession.

Many questions came about when different legislators were discussing the different mandates for the G. I. Bill. Questions such as should every veteran receive the benefits or only those soldiers returning that are under the age of twenty five years old? Or another question that arose that is described in Altschuler's book is "After one year, should government officials in the VA or the U. S. Office of Education select the best students in fields (like engineering) where shortages were anticipated- and authorize them to complete undergraduate, professional, or graduate degrees? Many more questions were being debated among legislators and it was a common perspective from right wing conservatives that the bill had ties to the Roosevelt's New Deal. However, in the end the Republicans understood the importance of the bill to the returning soldiers and that is why the bill was able to pass. The most pressing matter was the matter of the Readjustment was the part of the bill granting unemployment. Among the legislatures there was a debate over what was a fair number of weeks that a veteran could receive the unemployment benefits from the Readjust Act.

Some argued for fifty two weeks and others objected claiming that if veterans returned home to America and were able to receive money for a year then they would become very complacent and not want to put forward the effort after a year to go find a job. When using a digestion of minutes by Ross during the Nation Executive Committee Meeting during the dates of

November 18th through November 20th 1944, Ross makes the point, “ Within six months of discharge, about 70 percent of veterans without disabilities had found full-time employment. Another 8.8 percent had regular work in less than a year.

Thus, “ 52-20” and job placement services, which was once the key issue sponsors and supporters would now see the issue as less pressing by the end of 1945. ” With the resolution of the issue of unemployment resolved the bill could move forward in its debates. It is ironic to think that the most pressing issue of congress was the debate over the unemployment which in the end was the portion of the bill that had the least amount of impact and users. This strong debate over unemployment demonstrates the legislatures underestimating the amount of soldiers that would take advantage of the college portion of the G.

I. Bill. When trying to gain an understanding of the mindset of people in the 1940's I had a discussion with my grandmother on the G. I. Bill. Her husband Harold, who passed away before I ever had the opportunity to meet him, was directly affected by the Readjustment Act. She made the point to me that she was in high school as the war in Europe was coming to a close but he had actually been able to attend Colorado State University due to his years over in Europe and he made the point that the Readjustment Act was crucial to him to be able to go to school. When I asked her what she he told her about the G.

I. Bill? She responded by saying, “ He was just always very thankful for what the government had provided him with. Harold did not come from a lot of money and when he was drafted to the war he had a nervous feeling he used

to describe to me. Once he got out he did know what he was going to do but the G. I. Bill allowed him to get a good education that provided him with a career opportunity. " My grandmother's description of what her husband had told her about the G. I. Bill solidified to me the importance of the bill to so many different returning soldiers.

It didn't matter what region you were from or what your socio-economic status was at the time if a returning soldier wanted to better them through education it was now a possibility. Similar to Leslie Faulk from Western Pennsylvania, my grandfather had also risen out of poverty through the use of education that was made possible by the Readjustment Act of 1944. When conducting the interview with my grandmother Elizabeth, it showed me that as a history major that enjoys twentieth century American history I should be talking to my older family members to acquire more information.

It would be interesting because it would be from my own family's perspective on different issues I have acquired information about in my college history courses. The G. I. Bill had a lasting impact on so many individuals and is probably not recognized in history enough for the lasting impact that it had on the United States people and the government. The G. I. Bill's largest weakness is not allowing the equal opportunity for returning women or at least telling them about it as they were being discharged out of the war. The Veterans Administration made no special efforts to inform women of their benefits to which they were entitled.

Men were briefed about the bill when they were discharged; furthermore, once they were discharged they were provided with educational and vocational counseling. Metter explains the gender back that existed in the

Readjustment Act, he writes, " it was provided only sporadically to women. " Going Back to Civilian Life, a pamphlet issues by the War Department, did not refer to women. Moreover, since women were far less likely than men to join a veteran's organization, they lacked access to another important source of information and encouragement. " A woman not being given equal treatment to the distribution of the G.

I. Bill funds is no surprise as over the course of history there are many different instances where women have not been on an equal playing field. As a result of this statistic education and training under the bill, were far less significant for female veterans. The difference in treatment of women at this point in history is demonstrated by the occupational segregation and wage differentials that were being place on all women jobs. For jobs that carried a certain amount of influence or high status within a community women rarely got hired for these positions and if they did they would make less much money.

That factored into women not trying to pursuit a higher education because even if they were more qualified than a male candidate there was a good chance that the male would get hired due to genderdiscrimination. The uneven distribution of the G. I. Bill had a significant impact on the percentage of women in college. The uneven distribution of women in colleges is shown by Hartman when he writes, " Constituting 40 percent of all college graduates in 1940, women made up a mere 25 percent of degree candidates in 1950.

Since veterans received preferential treatment in the most selective, private colleges, women often had to choose between a public institution or no

institution at all. " By 1959 women accounted for a third of the college graduates but there still existed a large disproportion between genders. Keith Olsen, the author of *The G. I. Bill, Veterans, and Colleges* actually does a case study on the University of Wisconsin and he uses a quote from the President of the University of Wisconsin that was taken in 1950. The President states, " For the past four years we have gone " all out: to be of service to the ex-G.

I. s but the transaction has not been one-sided. Our 30, 000 student veterans have been a stabilizing influence in Wisconsin Student life. Their maturity had enabled them to raise scholarship levels. Their great sense of responsibility has improved student-faculty relationships. " The overall excitement and satisfaction of the President of Wisconsin exemplifies many of the beliefs that most in the academic world expressed at most of the returning soldiers were responsible and cared about their academics. One of the headlines of the *Daily Cardinal* which was the paper in Madison read, " U. W. Will Admit All Students It Can House. " The want ads of the Madison newspaper demonstrated the shortage of housing that occurred on many other campuses nationally. In Madison tents were set up to provide veterans a place to sleep while searching for a room. While the amount of housing was eventually solved with temporary housing being brought in, the impact that these students had on the colleges still has a lasting impact. Olson writes, " In addition to their superior performances, the veterans left a heritage to the college generation that followed.

They made the married student an accepted part of academic life and demonstrated the feasibility of a massive federal aid program to higher

education. " Other impacts that the G. I. Bill had on colleges is it increased state financial support of universities around the nation. These first students graduated under the G. I. Bill laid the ground work for the path that many kids choose today. Those kids that come from lower socio-economic status or possibly didn't do that well in school can now go to the military and receive financial aid for their military service. The G. I.

Bill transformed America in so many different ways and the importance of the bill should never be overlooked. The veterans who made their way into the classrooms first wanted to be treated as students that were known for fighting in World War II. They wanted to be absorbed into college communities with as little disruption as possible and receive an education. With their hard work within the classroom and their aid on the two different fronts during World War II these men were able to provide a better life for themselves and their families and they succeeded in doing just that.

The G. I. Bill allowed many people to live their own version of the " American Dream. " Bibliography Altschuler, Glenn C. , and Stuart M. Blumin. 2009. The GI Bill: a new deal for veterans. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 66 Dwight Eisenhower quotes out of Snyder, Logan Thomas. 2006. " THE CREATION OF AMERICA'S INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM. " American History 41, no. 2: 32-39. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed April 19, 2011). E. B. Fred, Report of the President, November 1950 from the book Olson, Keith W.

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