The education and training benefits of the G.I. Bill of Rights are renowned for their redistributive effects among nonblack veterans, but their consequences for black veterans remain in question. Among nonblacks, the provisions are known to have expanded access to education across class lines, and to have generated positive socioeconomic consequences. They also fostered greater postwar involvement in civic associations and political activities, particularly among less advantaged beneficiaries. Given the widely perceived view that the G.I. Bill represents a landmark social program, it is imperative to investigate whether access to its social and economic benefits transcended the rigid color line of the postwar era. As well, consideration of how the education and training benefits affected African-American veterans’ political participation may deepen our understanding of the relationship between governance and civic engagement.

The G.I. Bill, otherwise known as the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, offered a wide array of benefits to returning veterans of World War II. The education and training benefits constituted by far the most popular program, utilized by 51 percent of all returning veterans, or 7.8 million individuals. Veterans could use the benefits at any university or college that admitted them, as did 28 percent of beneficiaries, or like the remainder, in a variety of subcollege options, including trade and vocational programs, on-the-job or on-the-farm training, or the completion of high school. Studies in American Political Development, 19 (Spring 2005), 31–52.

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ISSN 0898–588X/05 $9.50
ceived monthly subsistence allowances, with extra amounts allotted for spouses and children.7

In evaluating the significance of the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits for African Americans, scholars dispute the nature of its first-order effects, meaning the inclusivity of its provisions and their social and economic consequences in recipients’ lives. Some accounts laud the program for expanding access to education among African Americans, and thus fostering the development of a black middle class.8 Most recent interpretations, in contrast, portray these same provisions as largely inaccessible to African American veterans. They argue that the G.I. Bill constituted, in effect, a form of “affirmative action” for white veterans, one that further reinforced racial inequality.9 Both variants, however, rest on sketchy evidence, most of it anecdotal in nature.

Public policies also generate significant second-order effects on the degree, form, and target of beneficiaries’ political participation. This may occur as they bestow resources that, in turn, boost beneficiaries’ civic capacity and thus facilitate their involvement, or as they convey messages to them about their role and place in the polity, thus affecting their inclination to become involved or their understanding of their interests.10 Through such “feedback” effects, policies may subsequently influence the political process itself. Some have argued that experiences of southern blacks in World War II and as returning veterans likely played a critical role in changing their expectations, thus fueling the Great Migration and the civil rights movement.11 We know little, however, about how such dynamics operated, and whether government programs themselves played any role in generating political activity. Possibly black veterans’ experience of the G.I. Bill in some way influenced the nature of their involvement in civic life.

This article assesses the impact of the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits on the lives of black veterans. Like my book-length study of the G.I. Bill’s effects among veterans generally, it draws on previously untapped historical data and recently collected survey and interview data in order to evaluate the inclusivity of the program and the dynamics shaping beneficiaries’ subsequent involvement in civic and political activities.12 Two analytical contributions, one empirical and one theoretical, are developed here in ways that are unique to this article. First, in empirical terms, this analysis challenges reigning assumptions about black veterans’ access to the education and training benefits and shows why a focus on college attendance and educational attainment fails to evaluate appropriately the program’s inclusivity. Second, in theoretical terms, this article illuminates how the historical sequencing of government activities in individuals’ lives can influence patterns of political participation. Paul Pierson, in Politics in Time, argues in theoretic terms that distinct temporal orderings may affect political outcomes; I offer an empirical example of how such dynamics operate among mass publics, and I explore the underlying mechanisms at work in the process.13 The argument is developed through consideration of how the character and succession of veterans’ interactions with government, from childhood through early adulthood, affected the form and intensity of their subsequent political involvement. Distinct patterns of sequencing of positive and negative experiences help explain why black and white veterans’ political participation took such different forms.


POLICY FEEDBACK, SEQUENCING, AND MASS PUBLICS

As we shall see, among black veterans of the 92nd Infantry Division, those who used the G.I. Bill for education or training proceeded, during the postwar era, to participate at very high levels in civic and political life. Following program usage, they became intensely involved in protest activity in the civil rights movement, greatly surpassing the participation rates of those black veterans who did not use the benefits.

Then, once political rights were achieved, they took part in a wide array of political activities, at rates that surpassed those of white veterans, both G.I. Bill users and nonusers. Our task is to explain why black G.I. Bill beneficiaries participated in politics at such high rates, and particularly in regime-challenging activities. Investigation of this question about policy feedback requires us to combine historical, institutional analysis with the study of individual political behavior.

To date, scholars of American political development have given considerable attention to policy feedback effects among public officials or interest groups, but relatively little to how policies might affect mass publics – whether groups, movements or individual citizens – by reshaping their political capacity, degree of involvement, or demands. Other scholars have theorized that the manner in which policies endow citizens with access to economic security or social opportunity (or fail to do so) conveys messages to them about their rights and civic obligations, potentially affecting their subsequent participation. Recently, a few have tested these claims empirically and have shown that the inclusion of citizens in social programs does have an impact on their subsequent civic engagement. Specifically, the degree and type of resources a program offers affect civic capacity, while the rules and procedures through which the program is administered may have interpretive effects on citizens’ inclination to be involved politically.

The analysis of how policies affect citizenship must be historical and state-centered, focusing on how patterns of governance intersect with stages in the life course of individuals, social groups, or generations. Although political behavior scholarship has gone far to identify underlying mechanisms, it derives primarily from cross-sectional data – mostly collected at some point in recent decades – that are typically examined without attention to historical context or temporal processes. Longitudinal studies often observe the relevance of the timing and sequencing of events within individual lives; however, they pay little heed to historical context, particularly in terms of the political significance of the relationship between government and citizens at a particular point in time. Some studies merge analysis of historical processes, state institutions, and political behavior, and show that the timing of public policy developments in relation to critical junctures of individuals’ lives can yield significant consequences, including for their later engagement in civic life.

My goal here is to illustrate how the sequencing of citizens’ experience of a given public policy relative to their other experiences of government might affect their political involvement. Attention to sequencing means observing how an event might gain significance not only through its own intrinsic characteristics, but also in light of the order of events that precede it and follow it, fostering what Pierson calls “dynamic down-stream characteristics.”

Works of American political development that embody this approach have tended to examine broad social transformations at the macro level, such as cross-national variation in the use of party patronage or adoption of national health insurance. Sociologists have paved the way in this direction, especially by focusing on key historical junctures where regime change or reconfiguration overlapped with major policy initiatives.


17. Mettler, “Bringing the State Back in to Civic Engagement.”
EMPIRICAL MATTERS: RECONSIDERING THE RACIAL INCLUSIVITY OF THE G.I. BILL

Examinations of the inclusivity of the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions among black veterans have been hindered by both analytical problems and data limitations. In evaluating the program, scholars have tended to conflate its effects with those attributable to other coexisting government policies, particularly legalized segregation of both the U.S. military and southern schools.24 While a combination of factors can help explain the impact of any public program, nonetheless it is important to distinguish between effects traceable to the policy itself – to features of program design and administrative arrangements for implementation – versus those emanating from other concurrent and contextual factors. For instance, it is the case that African Americans were underrepresented in the World War II military, given that they were less likely to meet the minimum standards of health and literacy required for induction, and thus fewer qualified for the G.I. Bill. Yet, such disparities are attributable to social inequality in the context of Jim Crow laws, not the G.I. Bill.25 For meaningful policy analysis, one must take heed of this and other related factors to the extent that they limited the reach and effectiveness of the G.I. Bill’s provisions; however, one should also distinguish carefully their effects from those inherent in the policy’s own terms.

Unfortunately, most research in these areas is limited by the fact that scholars have lacked access to comprehensive data. Because of this, most analyses tend to rely on a few data points, each from a single locality, a particular moment in time, or the experience of lone individuals. For instance, although David H. Onkst’s research represented until recently the most thorough study, the statistics he uses for rates of black program usage each come from a single year or spans of a few months, especially from moments within the first year or two after benefits became available.26

One newer study stands apart as the most systematic and nuanced analysis to date of the effects of the G.I. Bill on black Americans. Sarah E. Turner and John Bound used the 1970 Decennial Census to examine how the G.I. Bill affected “collegiate outcomes” among blacks and whites, considering both veterans and nonveterans. They find that outside of the South, the program had a “substantial and positive impact” on raising rates of college attendance among both blacks and whites. For black men in the South, however, the G.I. Bill had little such effect. As a result, Turner and Bound conclude that the program exacerbated educational inequality between southern white and black men.27

Even Turner and Bound’s research, however, is limited by an assumption that contemporary scholars often apply to evaluations of the G.I. Bill: They proceed as if the program’s success should be measured by the extent to which it enabled recipients to attend college, and as if the degree of its racial inclusivity is best indicated by the extent to which black veterans, relative to whites, used it to attend college.28

24 For instance, see Onkst, “First a Negro”; Cohen, A Consumers’ Republic, 167–70.
26 See sources cited in n. 9, esp. Onkst, “First a Negro . . . Incidentally a Veteran,” 525–32. Many of these draw on earlier studies that share the same limitations, e.g., Neil A. Wynn, The Afro-American and the Second World War (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1975), 113–16; Charles G. Bolte and Louis Harris, Our Negro Veterans, Public Affairs Pamphlet no. 128 (New York: Public Affairs Committee, 1947). There are several reasons to doubt the representative nature of such data points: veterans could use the benefits at any point across a ten-year period, from 1945 to 1955; use of the benefits for college peaked in 1948 and for vocational training programs, in 1950; and beneficiaries who were less likely to have obtained further education without the G.I. Bill benefits are more likely to have used them at a later date than those who simply used the government assistance to carry out their long-term personal plans (U.S. President’s Commission on Veterans’ Pensions, Veterans’ Benefits in the United States, 288).
28 For example, see Cohen, A Consumers’ Republic, 156–57, 169–70.
lems with this approach are twofold. First, it regards heightened levels of formal educational attainment as the chief hallmark of program success, assuming a high correlation between level of education and subsequent socioeconomic well-being. If we were evaluating the period from the mid-1970s to the present, this would make sense, given the wide disparity that emerged over this time between the income and opportunities of college-educated individuals versus those lacking such degrees. The postwar era was characterized, however, by wage compression, which elevated the earnings and benefits of those without college degrees and depressed the wages of the more highly educated individuals. Those who used the G.I. Bill’s sub-college training programs stood to gain working-class jobs that, at that historical juncture, garnered middle-class salaries and benefits. Second, analysts’ tendency to measure the program’s success according to users’ pursuit of higher education overlooks variations in veterans’ educational attainments prior to military service, which necessarily influenced the type of benefits they used. African Americans in the World War II military had gained significantly less education than whites previous to enlistment: Among those who served in the Army, only 17 percent of black soldiers had already graduated from high school, compared to 41 percent of white soldiers. While this disparity emanated from a priori factors, not the G.I. Bill, it nonetheless meant that black veterans would be less well poised to take advantage of the higher education provisions. Yet, the G.I. Bill also included a wide array of sub-college training and educational opportunities that could be utilized by those with less prior education. To evaluate the G.I. Bill appropriately, then, we must focus not on its effects for veterans’ highest levels of formal educational attainment, but rather, on rates of program usage, including in our purview both the higher education and sub-college variants.

Importantly, assessment of G.I. Bill usage rates by race is possible through data collected nationwide by the Research Division of the Veterans Administration in 1950, which have received surprisingly little scholarly attention to date. Contrary to the assumption that African Americans had little access to the G.I. Bill, Veterans Administration records verify that, over the first five years of the program, higher proportions of nonwhites than whites used the law’s education and training benefits. As shown in Figure 1, nationwide, by 1950, 49 percent of nonwhite veterans had used the benefits, compared to 43 percent of white veterans. The provisions were used at especially high rates in the South, where 51 percent of all veterans had entered some type of education or training by 1950. Strikingly, nonwhite southern veterans’ usage of the provisions surpassed that of white veterans in the region, at 56 percent compared to 50 percent. Similarly, in the West, 46 percent of nonwhite veterans went to school on the G.I. Bill, compared to 42 percent of white veterans. Nationwide, black World War II veterans would be less well poised to take advantage of the program through August 1950, when survey was conducted.


32. I am indebted to Michael K. Brown for sharing with me the complete report of these data, which he located in his extensive archival research in the records of the Bureau on Budget. See Figure 1 and n. 34.

33. Nationwide, 75 percent of nonwhites and 73 percent of whites used some form of G.I. Bill benefits (whether education or training, loans, unemployment benefits, etc.); though usage ratios varied slightly by region, from 74 to 80 percent among nonwhites compared to 73 to 74 percent among whites, everywhere nonwhite usage surpassed that of whites. U.S. Veterans Administration, Research Division, Coordination Services, “Benefits and Services Received by World War II Veterans under the Major Veterans Administration Programs,” 13, RG 51, ser. 39, box 9, NARA. Data shows total usage rates from start of program through August 1950, when survey was conducted.

34. U.S. Congress, Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, “Readjustment Benefits: General Survey and Appraisal: A Report on Veterans’ Benefits in the United States by the President’s Commission on Veterans’ Pensions,” Staff Report IX, pt. A (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 72; Veterans Administration, “Benefits and Services Received by World War II Veterans under the Major Veterans Administration Programs,” 13, 29, 27; Michael K. Brown, *Race, Money and the American Welfare State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 189–90 and Table 11. Another glimpse of G.I. Bill usage by race appeared in a 1953 study of veterans who had served in the Special Training Units, comprised of poorly educated soldiers who had been offered literacy training while in the Army. The Veterans Administration provided the authors, Eli Ginzberg and Douglas W. Bray, with data on the percentage of claimants for G.I. Bill educational benefits from such
War II veterans numbered 1,308,000; already by 1950, 640,920 of them had benefited from the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions.35

Given that African American veterans had less education than whites prior to military service, they were—not surprisingly—less likely to use the G.I. Bill to attend college; they were more likely than whites, however, to take advantage of the vocational training benefits. Other data corroborate these findings. For example, a 1979 Veterans Administration study showed that, among veterans of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, black veterans were less likely than whites to attend college on the G.I. Bill, but they were more likely than whites to use the sub-college programs, seeking especially to complete high school or to acquire vocational training.36 Importantly, however, participation in such programs does not affect an individual’s level of educational attainment as it is typically measured on surveys. Therefore, studies that evaluate the G.I. Bill only on the basis of either rates of college attendance or formal levels of educational attainment obscure the extent of its inclusivity across race. I will now turn to consideration of how such expansive program usage, interspersed as it was amidst black veterans’ other experiences, affected their civic engagement.

POLICY FEEDBACK EFFECTS AMONG BLACK VETERANS

The question of how black G.I. Bill users would participate in civic life after program usage is intriguing units. Southern blacks emerged as those most likely to use the benefits, with 68 percent making a claim, twice the rate of northern whites, among whom only 35 percent did so. They were more likely than whites in the region to use institutional training of some type, whereas whites were more likely to use farm training provisions. See Eli Ginsberg and Douglas W. Bray, The Uneducated (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 126.

35. Veterans Administration, “Benefits and Services Received by World War II Veterans under the Major Veterans Administration Programs,” 27. These rates are high despite the fact the blacks were more likely to receive “dishonorable discharges,” which meant that they were ineligible for the benefits; or “undesirable discharges” or “blue discharges,” which were sometimes used by administrators—contrary to the wishes of elected officials—to deny them benefits. See Allan Berube, Coming out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II (New York: Free Press, 1990), 230–35; Margot Canaday, Building a Straight State: Sexuality and Social Citizenship under the 1944 G.I. Bill, Journal of American History 90 (2003): 935–57. Presumably blacks might have used the provisions at even higher rates without such discrimination.

36. Veterans Administration, National Survey of Veterans, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1980). Although it remains outside the focus of their research, Bound and Turner offer a breakdown of these same data that illuminates the high rates of program usage in the World War II cohort group. See Bound and Turner, “Closing the Gap,” Table 2, 32. Among those born between 1923 and 1928, black veterans from most birth years were at least as likely, and often more likely, to take advantage of some kind of G.I. Bill education or training benefits, despite having substantially less prior education than white veterans. Only 12 percent of black G.I. Bill users compared to 28 percent of whites used the benefits for higher education (Bound and Turner, “Closing the Gap,” 5, n. 4).

given that among African Americans generally, the 1950s marked the real beginnings of the civil rights movement.37 The civic organizations joined most frequently by white male veterans were not known—at least during the postwar period—for taking an ardent stand on policy issues that fundamentally challenged the status quo; furthermore, some visibly embraced the more conservative tendencies of the period.38 Unraveling the relationship between black versus white veterans’ G.I. Bill usage and their very different civic outcomes requires, as we shall see, attention to the sequence of their particular experiences of government.

In order to probe the dynamics underlying policy feedback, we now turn to analysis of newly collected survey and interview data, particularly from the 92nd Infantry Division, a division of all-black enlist personnel that served in combat in Italy during World War II. (For a description of data collection processes and matters of representativeness, see Appendices A and B.) The strength of these data is that they contain numerous variables that do not exist elsewhere, and, thus, permit greater exploration of usage of the G.I. Bill education and training benefits and their effects among African-American veterans than has been possible previously. By comparing these data to those collected from four nonblack units,39 and relying as well on other primary and secondary sources, we can consider the dynamics underlying policy feedback among black veterans compared to white veterans.40

The World War II veterans survey data on black veterans does have limitations that restrict the kinds of analysis one can conduct. The sample is relatively


39. Among the 716 respondents to the survey from these four units, none were African American. Fourteen individuals who claimed identities besides or in addition to “white”—namely Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or American Indian/Native American—have been excluded from this analysis, their numbers being too small to permit meaningful group analysis. As a result, the comparisons here are between 104 black veterans and 702 white veterans.

40. Other primary sources include in-depth personal interviews with two Tuskegee airmen, and shorter phone interviews with twelve members of the 92nd Infantry Division.
Race and Experiences of Military Service

We begin by considering veterans’ experience of military service in World War II, given that it was the basis on which they qualified for the G.I. Bill. In the U.S. military, African Americans had strikingly different experiences than whites, ones that conveyed deeply negative messages to them about their role and place in the polity. Relegated to segregated troops, they were formally marginalized in a manner that was overt, pervasive, and a blatant contradiction to the United States’ posture in the battle against Nazism and fascism. Only after extensive and frac- tious congressional debate were two such units awarded the “right” to engage in combat. And, while white troops could focus on defeating Axis forces, black troops experienced a more complicated mission: proving themselves as a group even as they were treated as inferior to white soldiers.

The 92nd Infantry Division had been reactivated in 1942. Both blacks and whites served as officer personnel, but all senior officers were white. Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where the division trained, had separate clubs for black and white officers and two hospitals, one staffed by blacks for blacks and the other staffed by whites. Beginning in July 1944, the 92nd was moved to Italy, where it engaged in combat over the next nine months.

The experiences of African Americans from the 92nd Infantry are compared, here, to those of white veterans from four nonblack units: the 379th Bomb Group and 783rd Bomb Squadron of the U.S. Army Air Force and the 87th and 89th Infantry Divisions of the U.S. Army. Like the 92nd Infantry Division, all four served in the European theatre, the first two entering the air war in the spring of 1943 and 1944, respectively. The 87th joined the Allied campaign in France during the autumn of 1944, proceeding to participate in the Battle of the Bulge and advancing into Germany; the 89th came shortly thereafter, crossing the Rhine to join the Central Europe campaign as the American unit farthest to the east.

Unquestionably, soldiers in the 92nd Infantry Divi-

41. The black G.I. Bill users’ mean level of educational attainment, on a 7-point scale, was 5.31, with a standard deviation of 2.53; the white users’ was 5.49, standard deviation of 2.24. Black nonusers had a mean level of 3.09, standard deviation of 1.34; white nonusers, mean level of 3.26, standard deviation of 1.57.

42. Unfortunately, the one dataset that is, in other regards, the most useful for studying the political socialization of African American veterans of the World War II generation (southerners in particular), does not include a G.I. Bill variable. It is The Negro Political Participation Study, principal investigators Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consor- tium for Political Research, Mar.–June 1961, Jan.–Mar. 1962).
sion were treated differently than those in the non-black divisions. They often felt that their officers lacked confidence in them and failed to give decisive orders. Nonetheless, they carried out their mission fully, bearing considerable sacrifices: Between August 1944 and April 30, 1945, almost one-quarter of the men of the 92nd were lost, with 330 killed in action, 2,215 wounded, and 616 missing in action. Even then, black soldiers were not afforded the same recognition and honor as white servicemen; many of the deeds performed by members of the 92nd Infantry Division—which would have garnered rewards if done by white troops—went unrecognized at the time, as white officers often proved reluctant to request honors for deserving men in their command.

Whereas interviews with white veterans revealed that they typically considered their military service to have functioned mostly as a positive influence on their lives, black veterans derived largely negative lessons. Certainly, white veterans recalled deeply disturbing aspects of military service, including some misuses of authority by superiors, and, most of all, the brutal nature of combat and the losses of friends and comrades. For the most part, however, they found the demands of military to operate fairly. They felt that they gained from learning to get along with a diverse group of men from a wide array of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and that the responsibilities they assumed helped them to mature. They perceived the nation’s support for them and felt appreciated. By contrast, black soldiers encountered persistent discrimination. Through such treatment, government conveyed to them the message that they held an inferior status in the polity, despite their willingness to shoulder the obligations of civic duty.

Dynamics Underlying Usage

“Every black we knew used the G.I. Bill,” said Celeste Torian, whose husband served in the 92nd Infantry Division and later used the G.I. Bill to finance his college education. Indeed, reflecting the high usage rates revealed earlier, black veterans I interviewed found the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions to be readily available to them, and eligibility rules to be administered fairly. One African-American vocational training beneficiary, who used the G.I. Bill to learn watch making, described the program as “very accessible and very valuable,” and “fair, in my personal experience,” distinguishing his treatment in the program from the way the 92nd Infantry Division had been treated during the war. Another, who attended Case Western Reserve University on the G.I. Bill, described program administration as “pretty fair,” while contrasting that to some instances of informal discrimination he encountered during the course of his studies.

What factors determined which veterans utilized the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions? To examine this question, we compare experiences of members of the 92nd Infantry Division to those of whites from other units. Logistic regression analysis is used, not to offer specific estimates but rather to consider the relative significance of different variables in affecting program usage among each group. (See Appendix C.) The only determinant of benefit usage that emerged as significant among black veterans was their parents’ level of education; those veterans whose parents were more highly educated were especially likely to take advantage of the G.I. Bill. Evidently, parents’ educational level acted as a key determinant of black veterans’ well-being and expectations while growing up, which in turn influenced their capacity and predisposition to acquire more education.

White veterans’ G.I. Bill usage was qualified by a different and wider array of personal factors. Younger white veterans were especially inclined to use the G.I. Bill to further their education; older ones more often felt that the window of opportunity for advanced education had passed them by, and that they needed to focus their energies instead on supporting a family. By contrast, African-American veterans, regardless of their age, seized the opportunity to acquire more education. White veterans’ G.I. Bill usage also depended on how much prior education they had. They were significantly more likely to use the benefits if they had more education prior to military service, whereas this factor did not register as a determinant of black veterans’ usage. Furthermore, white veterans who had been socialized as children to pursue more education were also significantly more likely to use the benefits. While this factor was insignificant among black members of the 92nd Infantry Division, it is worth noting that they were more likely than white survey respondents to report that they had been encouraged, during childhood, to pursue an education. The majority,


49. Hondon B. Hargrove, Black Soldiers in Italy: Black Americans in World War II (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Col, Inc., 1985); Nulty, Strength for the Fight, 172–74. Some medals have been awarded only recently. In 2000, the Medal of Honor was bestowed posthumously on Lt. John Fox, who died in action after giving a command that put his own life at risk in Sommacolonia on December 26, 1944. Rod Norland, “As Good as Anybody Else’: Honoring the Courage of WWII’s ‘Buffalo Soldiers’,” Newsweek July 24, 2000, 48.

50. Mettler, Soldiers to Citizens, chap. 3.

51. Author’s telephone conversation with Celeste Torian, April 9, 2002.

52. Logistic regression analysis was used to examine a model in which the dependent variable is a dummy variable denoting usage of the G.I. Bill for education or training versus nonusage. The independent variables include parents’ level of education (measured on a scale from no formal schooling to graduate or professional degree, 1–7), standard of living in childhood (from low to high, 1–5), extent to which education encouraged while growing up (from strongly discouraged to strongly encouraged, 1–5), actual year of birth, and level of education prior to military service (elementary school only to advanced graduate work, 1–9).
55 percent, reported that while they were growing up, family members strongly encouraged them to pursue an education, compared to 31 percent of white veterans. As one black veteran commented, during the mid-century, “Education [was] the number one project in the South in the black community. I mean if you [had] any possibility of going to college, you [were] going to take it.”

By offering generous tuition support, the G.I. Bill should have functioned as a redistributive program that allowed all veterans – regardless of class background – to attend the best educational institutions that admitted them. Black respondents were more likely than whites to have grown up poor: They were twice as likely to report that their family had a low standard of living while they were growing up (31 percent compared to 16 percent). Interestingly, standard of living in childhood did not act as a significant determinant of G.I. Bill usage among either the black or white sample. This underscores the program’s availability to veterans regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Overall, usage of the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits appears to have been as accessible to veterans of the 92nd Infantry Division as it was to white veterans. The survey data analyzed here suggest that African-American veterans were deeply committed to acquiring more education, and that the G.I. Bill made it possible for them to do so. In the process, they ignored the kinds of personal obstacles that discouraged many white veterans from seeking further education. Black veterans were typically less well positioned than white veterans to pursue higher education, but those who could do so seized the opportunity. Others turned to the sub-college programs, using them at rates that surpassed those of white veterans.

Thus, in sharp contrast to their prior encounters with government, black veterans who used the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions experienced fair and generous treatment at the hands of government.53 Usage of the benefits is likely to have yielded positive resource effects, given the skills, education, and personal networks attained through the program. As well, it may have generated some positive interpretive effects, owing to the messages conveyed to beneficiaries that they were privileged beneficiaries and deserving bearers of rights.

### The Implementation Experience

Veterans’ experience of the implementation of the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits depended not only on the policy’s own rules for eligibility, however, but also on the availability of institutions and programs in which to use such benefits and the way in which beneficiaries were treated within them. White veterans tended to have mostly positive experiences of implementation: Those who attended universities raved about how well they were treated, while those who used sub-college programs offered only mild complaints about the occasional bureaucratic obstacle. Given the long-standing exclusivity in admissions, whether by custom, institutional rules, or law, black veterans’ experience of implementation would depend largely on how universities, colleges, and vocational schools dealt with the program. Quota systems that limited the number of students of particular ethnicities and religious backgrounds – African-American as well as Jewish students – were well entrenched at elite institutions of higher education in the North.54 The most formal and pervasive barriers existed in the South, as seventeen states and the District of Columbia mandated separate schools for whites and blacks at every level. Numerous other states – even some that had enacted legal prohibitions – generally permitted segregated schools.55

The G.I. Bill was implemented amidst growing pressure on government and educational institutions to remove these barriers to equal educational opportunity. Immediately following the enactment of the legislation, Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), informed President Roosevelt that

> one of the most important instrumentalities toward assurance of equality of opportunity without regard to race, creed, color or national origin will be the Veterans Bureau and the implementation by the Bureau of the . . . G.I. Bill of Rights Act.56

Later, leaders of the National Education Association (NEA) and related groups pressed Roosevelt to eliminate “quotas and other forms of racial and religious discrimination in the nation’s colleges, especially in relation to returning service men seeking education under the G.I. Bill of Rights.”57 While the Roosevelt administration responded to such requests merely

53. These effects might have been less than they could have been given a racial bias in dishonorable discharges and blue discharges. This has yet to be documented carefully, but useful analysis appears in studies that focus on servicemembers accused of “homosexual acts or tendencies,” in n. 35.


56. Letter, Walter White, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 5, 1941, file “Colored Matters (Negroes), Oct.–Dec. 1944,” Box #6, OF #9, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.

57. Telegram, Dr. Alonzo Myers, Donald DuShane, and Ralph McDonald to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 8, 1945, file “Education 1945,” Box 5, OF 107, Roosevelt Library.
with polite letters, a more dramatic response came in 1947, when President Truman’s Commission on Higher Education published *Higher Education for American Democracy*, a scathing report that detailed the barriers to educational opportunity in the United States.65

A series of court decisions signaled the first cracks in the wall of segregation in higher education.59 In *Sipuel v. Board of Regents* (1948), the Supreme Court decided against the state of Oklahoma for refusing to admit a qualified student to its state law school on the basis of race.60 Two years later, the Court ruled unanimously in *Sweatt v. Painter* that racial admissions criteria and segregated law school facilities failed to meet the demands of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.61 Among the bevy of amicus curiae briefs, the American Veterans Committee, a veterans’ service organization founded in 1944, argued for an end to segregation so that African American veterans could fully use their G.I. Bill provisions.62 Next, in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, the Court declared that the segregation of a single black student within a graduate school was unconstitutional.63 Although the wider implications of these decisions did not become evident until the 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the earlier decisions may have signaled to institutions of higher education that changes in old practices might be necessary.64

Whatever the reason, as the G.I. Bill was implemented, many institutions of higher education in the North and West dismantled their most overt discriminatory barriers. The program itself fostered a climate in which these institutions, inundated with applications, gained an incentive to adopt more competitive admissions policies rather than adhere to the traditional norms of exclusivity with respect to religious and ethnic background.65 Schools began to drop quota systems.66 A perusal of the institutions that members of the 92nd Infantry Division attended outside of the South is revealing: Although some attended historically black institutions such as Wilberforce University in Ohio and Lincoln in Pennsylvania, the majority attended integrated institutions, including Delphi, Wayne State, University of Iowa, Fisk, Ohio State, University of Chicago, Purdue, University of California-Berkeley, San Francisco State, San Jose State, Pasadena Community College, City College of New York, Penn State, Queens College, and many others.

As educational institutions in the North and West eradicated prior obstacles to admission, millions of African Americans continued their gradual migration to those regions. In fact, though the “Great Migration” is best characterized as a long-term transformation, still the postwar years marked the culmination of the relocation of blacks from sharecropping and rural and small-town life in the South to urban centers elsewhere.67 Strikingly, by 1947, one of every ten black veterans already had migrated from his or her childhood home in the South to the North or West, where they found schools increasingly willing to accept qualified students on a color-blind basis.68

The confluence of black migration and the demise of quotas produced results that stunned educational professionals. Indeed, analysts in the late 1940s observed that “an almost unbelievable increase has taken place” in the enrollment of blacks at universities in the North and West, “probably totaling some four or five thousand students as contrasted with two or two and a half thousand formerly.”69 The outcomes were most pronounced in the context of individual institutions, and especially, individual lives. Reginald Wilson reports that one-third of the veterans at his alma mater, Wayne State University in Detroit, were African American.70 Henry Hervey, a black Tuskegee airman who was able to attend his first-choice institution, Northwestern University, explained that without the G.I. Bill:

> I possibly would have continued [my education] but it would have been at a local [junior] college . . . [where] the tuition was $60 a semester . . . So there’s a possibility I would have [gone to college] but it would have taken much longer. But the assistance of the G.I. program, it helped a lot of people.

Given the availability of G.I. Bill funds, combined with nondiscriminatory admissions procedures at Northwestern, he – like thousands of other African-American veterans – was able to obtain his education.

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at a well-established, highly regarded, and increasingly integrated institution.

Still, nearly two-thirds of all black veterans continued to live in the South, where most institutions of higher education – with the exception of historically black institutions – remained formally closed to them. A few Southern respondents from the 92nd Infantry Division enrolled at integrated institutions such as the University of Maryland, Catholic University, George Washington University, Georgetown University, and American University. Far more frequently, respondents mentioned schools for blacks only, such as North Carolina A&T State, Tuskegee University (Alabama), Delaware State, Morgan State (Maryland), Howard University, Morehouse College, Tougaloo College (Mississippi), Florida A&M University, and Prairie View A&M University (Texas). Indeed, tens of thousands of black veterans crowded into the historically black colleges, increasing their enrollment by 50 percent from the beginning of 1940s. These findings mirror a 1947 analysis in The Journal of Negro Education, which surmised that throughout the entire southern region Negroes are now attending public colleges and universities organized primarily for white persons in only two states (Maryland and West Virginia) and private institutions in only 2 states (Maryland and Missouri) and the District of Columbia. Outside the District of Columbia there are probably not more than fifty Negro students altogether attending these institutions in the southern states.

Therefore, the value of the higher education provisions of the G.I. Bill in the South was contingent on the ability of historically black colleges and universities to accommodate black veterans.

Although black higher education institutions had improved immensely over the preceding decades, severely inadequate budgets and an undersupply of instructors hindered their quality. Thus, while overcrowding was the norm at institutions of higher education in the postwar years, black institutions bore a greater burden than most. The federal government responded to historically black colleges' needs for increased space and enhancement of the physical infrastructure, as it did for other such institutions. Still, the additional facilities did not begin to meet space demands. Black institutions also faced severe difficulties in hiring sufficient numbers of instructors, as potential instructors sought better opportunities in the North and West or in government service, where they could find better pay and working conditions.

Veterans who used sub-college programs in the South encountered similar problems. Although vocational and on-the-job training programs tended to be new and unprecedented in most localities, state authorities insisted – contrary to the aims of federal administrators – on establishing segregated programs. Most on-the-job programs were created for whites only, and separate programs were opened for blacks. While low levels of usage of on-the-farm training among black veterans may have resulted in part from their desire to leave agriculture behind, discrimination by local whites who administered training and controlled access to farm loans is more likely to explain the discrepancy.

In sum, whereas white veterans often encountered magnanimous treatment in the implementation of the education and training programs, black veterans' experiences varied. Those who lived in the North or West, including recent migrants, had the opportunity to attend the same institutions and programs as white beneficiaries. By contrast, black veterans who remained in the South had to use their benefits in a segregated institutional context that subjected them to separate programs with inferior conditions. This

73. Roach, “From Combat to Campus,” 2.
75. During the 1943–1944 academic year, public and private black institutions in the South spent one dollar for every nine dollars in the budgets of the region’s white institutions (ibid., 468).
76. George N. Redd, “Present Status of Negro Higher and Professional Education: A Critical Summary,” Journal of Negro Education 27 (1948): 401–2. Between 1946 and 1947, the peak enrollment period, while enrollment at universities and colleges generally increased by 15 percent, black institutions expanded by 26 percent, growing from 29,000 in 1940 to 58,000 in 1946 and
77. Officers of the Commissioner on Education estimated new floor-space needs of 80 square feet per veteran at the black southern institutions, much of the double the needs they assessed for white institutions in the region (Atkins, “Negro Educational Institutions,” 146).
experience, by contrast to access to G.I. Bill benefits, likely conveyed negative messages, producing an interpretive effect at odds with that of program usage itself. Once veterans completed their programs of study, what difference would their new skills and degrees make in their lives?

Socioeconomic Effects of Program Usage

Social scientists have long known that World War II marked a critical turning point in the lives of many veterans, meaning that it was an event or experience that shaped their course of life in significant ways; the World War II survey data suggest that G.I. Bill usage ranked similarly. A majority of respondents, white and black, included the G.I. Bill among such life-transforming events as growing up during the Depression, military service during World War II, education, job opportunities, and marriage. Among white respondents, 78 percent of those who used the G.I. Bill for higher education and 56 percent of those who enrolled in sub-college level programs listed the G.I. Bill among the turning points in their lives. Strikingly, among African-American G.I. Bill users, 92 percent of those who used it for college and 89 percent of those who used it for sub-college program listed it as a life turning point.

In explaining why they regarded G.I. Bill usage as a life turning point, African-American beneficiaries from the 92nd Infantry offered some reasons that resembled those offered frequently by white veterans, emphasizing social and economic effects. Black users of the sub-college programs noted, for instance, that the G.I. Bill “made it possible to attend business school” or “enabled me to support my family;” one remarked, “after time I spent on G.I. Bill in school, [I] got [a] job with [the] civil service from which I retired.” Those who used the higher education provisions said that the G.I. Bill, “ensured my achieving a college education,” “paid for a better education,” “enabled me to achieve my career goal,” and “made possible young marriage.”

Often, however, African-American veterans responded in distinct ways, emphasizing the prevalence of discrimination in many facets of life and how the G.I. Bill thwarted those patterns. As one man who used the G.I. Bill for automotive training noted, “It opened the doors to jobs that society had to give me because of my time in the military.” Veterans who used the G.I. Bill for higher education mentioned that it “prepared me for [a] position I never dreamed possible” and “enabled me to attend [the] college of my choice” – striking comments coming from men whose options for education would have been much restricted without the program. One beneficiary explained that, “despite [the] racism of [the] country [I] was able to gain job opportunities because of college education.”

In terms of income, black veterans with higher levels of education – attained primarily through the G.I. Bill – did earn larger paychecks in the postwar era than those with less formal education, but the difference was less pronounced than among white veterans. During the postwar era, the wage differential between individuals with one to three years of college and high school graduates was only $500 annually among nonwhites, compared to $1,300 among whites. Although earnings for both whites and nonwhites were lower in the South than elsewhere, the ratio was similar in all regions. While unequal pay for the same jobs partially explains such disparity, the persistence of occupational segregation remained the overriding determinant.

Although many African-American veterans found that outside of the South, the education and training provisions of the G.I. Bill were administered in a nondiscriminatory fashion, still the job market to which they returned, degrees in hand, remained highly segmented. Often, they encountered the same barriers to advancement that they had faced previously. Henry Hervey explained,

> when I finished [my degree at] Northwestern, I went looking for a job. But I went to every bank in downtown Chicago and presented my credentials, and I got the same job offer I would have gotten if I had not gone to college or had not gone in the Army: it was either a janitor or a mailroom clerk.

William Perry had the same experience after completing his fine arts degree at Ohio State: Only a U.S. Postal Service job – one that used none of his training – offered him any opportunity for advancement, until he found a job in his field some years later. Gentry Torian used the G.I. Bill to attend college, yet, for many years, he was unable to obtain a job in his chosen profession, teaching. His wife, Celeste Torian, explained that African Americans who served in World War II experienced pervasive discrimination both in the military and when they returned home. Remembering that time period, she remarked, “The only good thing was the G.I. Bill,” referring explicitly to the education and training provisions. One respondent noted of the G.I. Bill, “It changed my outlook on how to live, but I couldn’t change my color.” Indeed, another took it upon himself to write in “equal employment laws” as a significant “turning point” in his life. The G.I. Bill may have done much to prepare African Americans for higher-status jobs, but racial discrimination in labor markets continued to thwart their chances for social mobility.

84. Asked to rank their turning point choices, users of either program type gave the G.I. Bill a mean ranking of third in a list of seven options that included one factor they named themselves.
86. Once the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted, black family incomes did rise in relation to white family income during the
Occupational data from the World War II Veterans Survey permit us to explore the extent to which occupational status changed between fathers and sons, blacks and nonblacks. Grouping veterans by G.I. Bill usage, I have evaluated individuals’ occupational status in 1960 compared to their fathers’ status during their childhood.67 To exemplify the patterns among black veterans of the 92nd Infantry Division and their fathers, each of the following tables presents a small number of cases that are representative of the larger dataset from which it is drawn. Nonusers of the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits appear in Table 1, sub-college users in Table 2, and higher education users in Table 3.88

The data highlight occupational transformations between one generation and the next, and, at the same time, the persistent contours of institutionalized racism in employment. Most black veterans’ fathers worked as semiskilled or unskilled laborers – janitors, masons, bricklayers, dry cleaners, stevedores, factory workers, coal miners, and railroad workers – with only a few in highly skilled professions such as law, medicine, or education. Their sons’ occupations varied with the level of education they obtained, much of it through the G.I. Bill. Some black non-G.I. Bill users, after military service, gained positions with greater leadership responsibility than their fathers, for instance as foremen in industry or as master sergeants in the U.S. Army, but G.I. Bill users typically achieved a higher occupational status. Those who used the vocational training programs, such as the examples shown in Table 2, frequently continued military service or gained civil service jobs as policemen, mail carriers, and clerks. They do not, however, appear to have gained the highly technical industrial jobs that their white peers were granted. The black higher education beneficiaries, represented by examples in Table 3, typically attained employment in the public sector as teachers or civil servants or in the military. They did not gain the highest status jobs in the private sector attained by some white higher education users, namely as higher executives, proprietors of large concerns, and major professionals.89 The employment gained by African-American veterans,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s Occupation during Veteran’s Childhood</th>
<th>Veteran’s Occupation, 1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal miner</td>
<td>Crane operator, U.S. Steel Machinery operator, railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Supply and load master, U.S. Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section hand-worker, railroad</td>
<td>Police officer, Bell Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masonry work</td>
<td>Storekeeper, Bell Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>Polyclinic, NYC, Transit Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman, Department of Sanitation, Civil Service</td>
<td>Foreman, NYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Ammunition foreman, Army Depot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Nonusers of G.I. Bill Education and Training Benefits, Black Males, World War II Veterans Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s Occupation during Veteran’s Childhood</th>
<th>Veteran’s Occupation, 1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, Steel worker</td>
<td>Patrolman, police department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Munitions operator, arsenal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, construction</td>
<td>Laborer, Railroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pullman porter, railroad</td>
<td>Inspector, rubber company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiter, railroad dining car</td>
<td>Patrolman, NYC Police Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Auto mechanic, U.S. government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chauffeur</td>
<td>Post office clerk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Vocational Education Users of G.I. Bill, Black Males, World War II Veterans Survey

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67. To do this analysis, I used the Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Position, which bases scores on a combination of the skill and power associated with each occupational role and the amount of education necessary for it. The scale includes seven levels, from lowest to highest: unskilled employees; machine operators and semi-skilled employees; skilled manual employees; clerical and sales workers, technicians, and owners of little businesses; administrative personnel, small independent business owners, and minor professionals; business managers, proprietors of medium-size businesses, and lesser professionals; higher executives, proprietors of large concerns, and major professionals (August B. Hollingshead, “Two Factor Index of Social Position,” (New Haven, CT, 1957), paper in author’s possession. I am indebted to Richard Braungart for advising me on use of occupational scales.

88. Analysis of nonblack veterans’ occupational status appears in Mettler, Soldiers to Citizens, chap. 5.

89. This is generally consistent with findings about the post-war era in James A. Geschwender, “Social Structure and the Negro Revolt: An Examination of Some Hypotheses,” Social Forces 43 (1964): 251–53, though that analysis does not account for G.I. Bill usage.
therefore, highlights both the scope and the limitations of antidiscrimination provisions that were applied to government employment beginning with the Fair Employment Practices Commission in the 1940s, and subsequent reforms prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.90

In sum, the socioeconomic effects of the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions for African Americans appear to have been mixed. Beneficiaries remain quite convinced that the provisions marked a turning point in their lives, and thus they seem to have generated interpretive effects. In terms of resource effects, however, though G.I. Bill users enjoyed greater social mobility than nonusers, they did so within much narrower parameters than white beneficiaries. To be sure, the era harkeden a moderating influence in employment curtailed the scope of its effects in their lives.

Veterans’ Civic and Political Involvement

Now we arrive at the crux of this inquiry: Once veterans benefited from the education and training benefits of the G.I. Bill, how would they participate in civic life? I will now explore the relationship between ben-

92. Two obstacles prevent us from evaluating these questions through regression analysis. First, the number of African-American veterans among World War II Veterans Survey respondents is too small to permit analysis involving the relatively large number of independent variables necessary to explain civic engagement. Second, distinct from white veterans, nearly all of the African Americans in the sample who have a high degree of education used the G.I. Bill to attain it, meaning that the control group of highly educated non-G.I. Bill users is almost nonexistent. For analytical purposes, this absence of a “control group” means that we cannot, with any precision, separate the effect of the policy itself from that of the education or training it offered.

In the World War II Veterans Survey data, G.I. Bill users – among both blacks and whites – consistently exhibited higher rates of civic memberships than nonusers, as shown in Table 4. The first two rows show the mean numbers of memberships (1950–1964 and 1965–1979) in any of four types of civic organizations: fraternal groups, neighborhood or homeowners groups, parent-teacher or school support groups, and other civic organizations. African American survey respondents from the 92nd Infantry Division were considerably more active in such organizations than whites, whether or not they had used the G.I. Bill, though the ratio of G.I. Bill users’ membership rates to those of nonusers’ was nearly identical between African-American and white veterans. Among all four groups, rates of involvement grew from the first period to the second, consistent with typical life course patterns: organizational involvement tends to peak in middle-age.\footnote{Putnam, Bowling Alone, 248–49.}

African-American veterans also participated in different types of organizations than white veterans, and were more likely to belong to those that made social change a central objective. They were slightly less likely than whites to belong to fraternal organizations, and much more likely to belong to ethnic or nationality organizations and to groups in the category classified as “other.”\footnote{Suzanne Mettler and Theda Skocpol, “What Made the Civic Generation So Civic? What World War II Veteran Data Can Tell Us,” paper presented at Annual Meeting, Social Science History Association, October 19–22, St. Louis, MO.}

This last category included, particularly, groups related to hospitals, health, or helping sympathetic vulnerable groups; and black college fraternities. Among the latter, G.I. Bill-educated black veterans were especially active in Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi, and Kappa Alpha Psi, each of which played a supporting role in the civil rights movement, through chapter contributions to the NAACP during the 1950s and leadership roles in demonstrations during the 1960s.\footnote{Lawrence Otis Graham, Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 86; Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Official Website, http://www.oppf.org/about/history.asp; phone interview with A. William Perry, February 10, 2003.}

G.I. Bill users were also more likely than nonusers to belong to political organizations, as shown in the third and fourth rows of Table 4. Both black and white G.I. Bill users demonstrated identical mean rates of involvement in political clubs and party committees between 1950 and 1964 period; however, black users’ rates of affiliation surpassed that of whites after the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. Notably, the types of political organizations in which African-Americans G.I. Bill users were most active, especially the NAACP and Urban League, were those that stood at the forefront of the civil rights movement.

Next, we examine how black G.I. Bill users from the 92nd Infantry Division compared to white veterans in their involvement in a wide array of political activities. Table 5 presents descriptive statistics regarding the

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### Table 4. Mean Level of Involvement in Selected Organizations, Users versus Nonusers of G.I. Bill Education and Training Benefits, African American and White Veterans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Activity and Time Period</th>
<th>African-American Veterans</th>
<th>White Veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memberships in Civic Organizations, 1950–1964</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.41)</td>
<td>(2.25)</td>
<td>(1.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships in Civic Organizations, 1965–1979</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.70)</td>
<td>(2.67)</td>
<td>(1.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships in Political Organizations, 1950–1964</td>
<td>0*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(.43)</td>
<td>(.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships in Political Organizations, 1965–1979</td>
<td>0*</td>
<td>.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(.56)</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 75 557

Standard deviations in parentheses; * marks relationships significant at p<.05.

Comparing the amount of participation by G.I. Bill users and nonusers, it is evident that program beneficiaries participated at higher rates in every aspect of political involvement. Among both blacks and whites, users' average participation rates greatly surpassed those of nonusers. With the exception of protest, the ratio of involvement between users and nonusers is nearly identical among black and whites, about two to one in each case.

In terms of type of involvement, black G.I. Bill users participated at especially high levels in confrontational political activity, challenging politics as usual. Their involvement surpassed that of black nonusers most dramatically in protests, marches, and demonstrations. During the height of the civil rights era, 1950 to 1964, 35 percent of black users participated in such activities, compared to 8 percent of black nonusers; between 1965 and 1979, they sustained similar rates of involvement. Open-ended survey data confirm that civil rights were the main purpose of such activism. Some respondents offered specifics, noting "civil rights sit ins," "against Jim Crow," "1963 March on Washington," "anti-discrimination march with NAACP," "desegregation," "open housing," "petitioning for right to vote, which had been denied to us," "better schools/fair employment," and "job rights/opportunities." These data suggest that among African-American veterans, G.I. Bill usage may have figured as an important determinant of system-challenging political participation during the postwar era.

Comparing African-American veterans' involvement between the first and second time periods, the data suggest a two-stage process of political incorporation. Protest activity peaked in the first period, while involvement in a wide array of formal political activities reached its height in the second period. African-American G.I. Bill users helped lead the way toward political change in the 1950 to 1964 period, in

Table 5. Political Involvement of Users Versus Nonusers of G.I. Bill Education and Training Benefits, African-American and White World War II Veterans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Activity and Time Period</th>
<th>African-American Veterans</th>
<th>White Veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in Protest, March, Demonstration, 1950–1964</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in Protest, March, Demonstration, 1965–1979</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Political Official, 1950–1964</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Political Official, 1965–1979</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked on Political Campaign, 1950–1964</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked on Political Campaign, 1965–1979</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served in Local Government, 1950–1964</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served in Local Government, 1965–1979</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed Money to Political Candidate, Party or Group, 1950–1964</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed Money to Political Candidate, Party or Group, 1965–1979</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average w/o Protest</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: World War II Veterans Survey*
a struggle that led to the achievement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and numerous other policies. Then, in the years following, they participated at even higher levels in formal politics: They became increasingly active in working on campaigns; serving on local government boards or councils that dealt with community problems and issues; and contributing money to a political candidate, party, or group. Strikingly, between 1965 and 1979, 31 percent of black G.I. Bill users in this sample participated in local government, and 30 percent worked on political campaigns—both cases, dwarfing involvement among white beneficiaries and black nonbeneficiaries. These high levels of involvement, relative to whites, are particularly impressive given, as noted early on, that the mean educational level of black beneficiaries is similar to but slightly less than that of white beneficiaries.

In sum, among black 92nd Infantry Division veterans, those who used the G.I. Bill for education or training became especially active in the organizational and political struggles for civil rights, and then they exercised their newly won political rights at remarkably high levels. The point is not that the G.I. Bill alone explains the larger mobilization for civil rights; certainly, most who took to the streets were not veterans, and a wide range of organizational, social, economic, and political factors coalesced to prompt the broader mobilization. Rather, the same program that prompted white veterans to become especially active in civic fraternal organizations and mainstream political activities appears to have helped encourage, enable, or provoke black veterans to mobilize against existing political structures, demonstrating and marching for change. African-American G.I. Bill beneficiaries mobilized at high levels in contentious politics, facilitating social and political change, even as white veterans joined in mainstream political activities.

**FEEDBACK EFFECTS AND SEQUENCING**

Now, we can analyze how G.I. Bill usage and its relationship to the experiences that preceded and succeeded it affected the postwar civic involvement of black and white veterans. To some extent, black G.I. Bill beneficiaries’ high rates of political involvement likely emanated from the same resource and interpretive dynamics that had positive effects among nonblack veterans. As scholars of political behavior know, education—the most immediate resource offered through the program—greatly enhances individuals’ capacity and inclination to take part in politics. Advanced education has yielded highly salutary effects on political involvement among African Americans even when controlling for factors such as level of poverty in citizens’ neighborhoods. Furthermore, while higher education is widely regarded to confer civic lessons among those who attain it, several studies have found that education has produced a particular interpretive effect among African Americans: a sense of identifying and sharing a common fate with other members of their racial group. This finding is contrary to what some might assume—that the elevated status that comes with education might have distanced African-American college graduates from the larger black community. Rather, education has not only spurred heightened political activity, but it has also helped direct that activity toward the struggle for improved circumstances for blacks generally. A contemporary study by William G. Bowen and Derek Bok finds that college-educated black men become considerably more active in civic and political activities and leadership roles than their white male cohort group. African Americans who have had the opportunity to pursue advanced education often use the status and skills they achieve to give back to and maintain ties to the broader black community. Further, as I noted earlier, black G.I. Bill beneficiaries from the 92nd Infantry Division were even more likely than those from nonblack divisions to consider their use of the provisions to be a life turning point, suggesting particularly powerful interpretive effects that may have boosted civic involvement.

Yet, while such dynamics help explain high rates of civic participation by both black and white program beneficiaries, understanding the different forms their activism assumed requires attention to the sequencing of black veterans’ experiences of government compared to that known to white veterans. Table 6 compares the tenor of the interpretive messages—positive or negative—conveyed to each group through each of several sequential events, including: other experiences with government and military service; access to the G.I. Bill; the experience of program implementation; and finally, socioeconomic effects of usage.

White veterans typically had positive prior experiences of government. In interviews, they often mentioned New Deal programs that had been helpful to their families in the midst of the Great Depression. Regarding their military service, they generally felt they had been treated fairly in the processes of the...
draft, enlistment, and while on active duty. Next, they tended to have positive experiences of the G.I. Bill, finding it to be readily accessible, generally well-administered, and the source of beneficial socioeconomic effects on their lives. Given their repeated, positive experiences of government as it existed, it is not surprising that when these veterans became involved in politics, they did so in a conventional manner, affirming and supporting existing institutional norms and arrangements.107

Conversely, for black veterans, access to the G.I. Bill qualified as a positive experience of American government, one that stood in stark contrast to their other interactions with political power up until that time. First, prior to military service, African-American veterans and their families had experienced exclusion from or marginalization within most government programs, whether at the state or federal level. In southern states, Jim Crow laws sanctioned their segregation in schools, public transportation, and other public and private facilities. Primary and secondary educational institutions had long been characterized by a two-tiered system that denied blacks the opportunities enjoyed by whites.108 New Deal social programs routinely relegated African Americans to second-class status, whether through occupational exclusions or the retention of discretion by local elites.109

Military service, too, proved stigmatizing, as African Americans were relegated to segregated units, often forbidden the “privilege” of engaging in combat, and denied many of the honors and forms of recognition typically bestowed on their white comrades. Later, federal mortgage loan assistance programs – including the G.I. Bill’s mortgage provisions – required beneficiaries to find a local bank or lending institution willing to lend to them, at which point African Americans typically were excluded, due to “red-lining” procedures.110 The fact that the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions were made broadly accessible to them, then, represented a rare positive experience in a sea of negative experiences of government; to reiterate what Celeste Torian said, for blacks in the postwar era, “The only good thing was the G.I. Bill.”

Given such precedents, black veterans were likely to regard the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits as by far the most inclusive and valuable provisions available to them up until that point in their lives. Certainly, among southerners, the program’s positive interpretive effects may have been diffused by the persistence of formal educational segregation that restricted veterans’ options in the South and by overcrowding at black institutions. Veterans in other regions encountered instances of informal discrimination, as well. Nonetheless, even survey respondents who used the G.I. Bill to attend historically black institutions in the South tended to consider it a turning point in their lives, just as did those who attended integrated institutions elsewhere. Evidently, veterans appreciated the program considerably and separated its value from Jim Crow laws that mandated separate schools.

107. Mettler, Soldiers to Citizens.

### Table 6. Sequencing Matters: From G.I. Bill Education and Training Usage to Participatory Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequential Order of Events</th>
<th>White G.I Bill Users</th>
<th>Black G.I Bill Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prior Experience of Public Programs</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Basis of Eligibility for G.I. Bill (Military Service)</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Access to Usage</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Experience of Implementation</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive experience of program; negative experience of institutional context depending on region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Socioeconomic Effects</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Participatory Effects</td>
<td>High. Diverse, conventional.</td>
<td>Very high. Contentious first; then diverse, conventional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Following program usage, however, African American G.I. Bill users’ returned to a job market that continued to be as hostile and discriminatory as ever. When they sought employment, with their college degrees or training certificates in hand, they found, routinely, that they were granted the same low-level positions that they could have attained even without additional schooling. At this point, they knew from their G.I. Bill experience that they had the right to be treated on equal terms to other Americans. Thus, their encounter with discrimination at this juncture provoked their political mobilization, as the fundamental unfairness of such treatment became all the more evident and intolerable following experiences that differed so sharply. Also, through their G.I. Bill-funded education and training, African-American veterans had attained the skills and resources and networks that make political action possible. Black G.I. Bill users thus took to the streets, demanding fundamental changes in American politics and society.

In sum, in the experiences of members of the 92nd Infantry Division, the education and training benefits of the G.I. Bill appear to have influenced both the rate and form of their civic involvement. The advanced education offered by the program likely yielded particularly strong resource and interpretive effects among them that boosted their degree of involvement. As one survey respondent noted, the G.I. Bill marked a life turning point because it gave him the “educational background to give leadership,” stimulating his later involvement in the civil rights movement. At the same time, the sequencing of black veterans’ usage of the program relative to their other experiences of government helps explain why their involvement took the form of status-quo challenging activism. As Henry Hervey explained his reaction to employment discrimination after obtaining his college degree on the G.I. Bill, “By that time you learn that you can fight city hall, and you have to fight, and there are ways you can bring pressure to make changes.”

111. Christopher Parker offers a complementary explanation of why black veterans became especially interested and active in politics. He argues that black veterans’ treatment as citizens stimulated their militancy; other aspects of service solidified their group identity; and enhanced education and status attainment boosted civic capacity. G.I. Bill usage per se does not figure into his analysis as it was not included in the Mathews-Prothro dataset he uses. See Parker, “Explaining the Political Consciousness of Black Veterans.”


CONCLUSION

American policy history is replete with examples of government programs that excluded or marginalized African Americans, often explicitly and sometimes implicitly, treating them time and again as second-class citizens. Indeed, the extensive legacy of policy failure presents challenges to citizens and policymakers who seek alternatives, social programs that can lessen inequality and expand democracy. The findings here suggest that the education and training provisions of the G.I. Bill offer an example of a public program that was relatively inclusive in terms of its reach among African-American veterans.

Although they had less prior education than whites, black veterans seized the opportunity to attend college on the G.I. Bill if at all possible, and otherwise, they pursued sub-college training, surpassing whites in their rates of program usage. Certainly, the effects of the education and training provisions were limited by their implementation in the context of segregated educational institutions throughout the South, and the persistence of racism in the labor markets that veterans reentered after program usage. Nonetheless, the program itself succeeded in granting African Americans more access to advanced education than they had known, boosting their educational attainment especially in the North, and treating them more equitably than any U.S. social program in their own generation’s memory.

Subsequently, in the experience of black veterans in the 92nd Infantry Division, the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits appear to have facilitated involvement in democratic citizenship. Given their placement in a sequence of black veterans’ other experiences of government, they likely helped foster beneficiaries’ high rates of participation in the civil rights movement and in the active claiming of political rights that followed. Thus, the same program that prompted white veterans to be more active in civic fraternal organizations and in mainstream political activities facilitated black beneficiaries’ capacity to mobilize against existing political structures, demonstrating and marching for change. Policymakers renewed and extended the G.I. Bill in similar form for Korean War veterans, and it likely generated similar dynamics among African Americans. Indeed, among the most well-known black political leaders from the “civic generation” are several who benefited from the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions: civil rights leaders Medgar Evers, Aaron Henry, W. W. Law, and Hosea Williams; Chicago Mayor Harold Washington and all World War II veterans; U.S. Representatives John Conyers, Ronald Dellums, and Charles Rangel; and Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder and all Korean War veterans. Each of them likely rep-

represents many thousands of lesser-known black veterans whom, after benefiting from the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits, became politically active in their local communities.

Scholars of American political development should turn their attention to other instances of how state action has, historically, affected the well-being and character of social and participatory citizenship. This analysis suggests that the feedback effects of a program may be contingent not only on policy design and institutional context, but also on the historical sequencing of program receipt in relation to other experiences of government in beneficiaries’ lives. These conclusions must be tentative, owing to the limitations of the data on which the argument is based. Given the lack of a control group of highly educated black veterans who did not use the G.I. Bill, we cannot, with certainty, separate the results of program usage from education itself. Nor can we be confident of the extent to which results from the 92nd Infantry Division sample reveal patterns identical to those that existed among black veterans generally in the postwar era. In order to further our understanding of the historical dynamics of policy feedback and sequencing among mass publics, scholars should seek sources of data that permit more rigorous evaluation.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY TECHNIQUES

Most quantitative studies of political participation are based on large data sets that include numerous variables regarding demographic characteristics and attitudes but little about government programs. Such data, however, lack indicators about G.I. Bill participation. Conversely, though a few surveys of veterans conducted shortly after World War II permit analysis of the characteristics of G.I. Bill beneficiaries and the socioeconomic effects of the program, they failed to ask about participation in civic and political life.

This project, therefore, draws on recently collected, original survey data. Because no ready means of access to a national, random sample of all World War II veterans was available, it was necessary to find an alternative means of reaching veterans. Many survivors from World War II military units have formed their own veterans’ organizations, groups that typically have mailing lists, generate newsletters, and hold reunions. It is important to note that military units drew their members from the nation as a whole, as do the veterans’ organizations based on them. Several such organizations were contacted in an attempt to locate a few sufficiently different from each other and large enough to include veterans with a wide range of personal backgrounds, military ranks, and wartime experiences. Lists from five military units were used, including three from the U.S. Army (87th Infantry Division, 89th Infantry Division, 92nd Infantry Division) and two from the U.S. Army Air Force (379th Bomb Group, 783rd Bomb Squadron, 465th Bomb Group). These units included only men. The 92nd Infantry Division was comprised of African Americans; no African Americans were included in other units.

A mail survey explored veterans’ socioeconomic status in childhood and later life, military and educational experience, G.I. Bill usage, and civic and political participation. Although many questions had been used in prior surveys, they had never been combined in a single survey in a manner that would permit structurally valid statistical analysis. The data permit investigation of the G.I. Bill’s consequences for participation in political activities, while controlling for level of education and various socioeconomic background factors. The survey subjects were randomly selected from names on the World War II military unit organizations’ lists. Surveys mailings were sent up to three times to each subject to increase the response rate, which eventually reached 73 percent (716 completed surveys) in a 1998 survey of all groups except the 92nd Infantry Division. Two different lists for the 92nd Infantry Division were attained later, and surveyed in 2000 and 2001 respectively, using the identical procedures. These yielded respons-

116. The relevant studies of African-American veterans which epitomize these mutually exclusive aspects of existing data are the Matthew and Prothro, The Negro Political Participation Study, and Veterans Administration, “Benefits and Services Received by World War II Veterans.”

117. Questions were drawn from surveys such as the U.S. Census, World Values Survey, General Social Survey, the 1990 Citizen Participation Study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, and various surveys conducted by the U.S. Veterans Administration.
es of 42 and 53 percent, respectively, for a total of 104 completed surveys.

Various measures were taken to handle or limit potential sources of bias. The fact that several decades have elapsed since the G.I. Bill was administered necessitated careful attention to constraints upon subjects’ memory and recall. These concerns are alleviated to some degree by scholars’ understanding that salience matters; that is, people recall events or activities that were important to them, otherwise known as “landmark events.” It is not important for this study to ascertain specific details from the past, such as the number of political party or political club meetings a person attended in a given year, or the particular elections in which they voted. Rather, the central question was whether or not the subjects were generally involved participants in such organizations and activities.

Before designing the survey, several open-ended interviews were conducted with veterans. This process, as well as the pretest of the survey and the focus group meeting that followed, helped guide the survey design process, limiting questions to those that veterans answered readily and with confidence. Participation in the war and the pursuit of education thereafter constitute landmark events in the autobiographical knowledge of most veterans, and as such, are memorable. Techniques known to improve accuracy of survey responses were used. Given that a second chance to answer questions is known to stimulate memory, a mail survey was used, allowing respondents to consider questions at their leisure.

Respondents were not questioned about past attitudes, given that intervening circumstances would likely influence their responses. Researchers have found that greater accuracy is obtained by framing questions for a specific time period; hence, specific responses were requested for three periods: 1950–1964, 1965–1979, and 1980–1998. This pairing of questions is intended to prompt respondents to consider how their activities might have changed, if at all, and thus to respond to the questions about the earlier period as clearly and thoughtfully as possible. Asking a number of questions about a given time period has proven to facilitate memory.

APPENDIX B: REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SAMPLE

Elsewhere, matters are discussed pertaining to the representativeness of the nonblack sample used in this article. This appendix examines how the African-American sample from the 92nd Infantry Division compares to the original population of African-American veterans of World War II, as well as to the sample of white veterans used here.

When World War II veterans were surveyed in 1998, the average veteran – born in 1923 – would have been 75 years old, then 77 in 2000 and 78 in 2001. Currently, the average life expectancy for African-American males is 68, and 75 for white males. The central problem with surveying veterans so late in life is that death rates are biased. In the United States, advanced age is positively correlated with being better educated. Demographers report a recent increase in longevity among American males that some consider attributable to the effects of the G.I. Bill. Accordingly, G.I. Bill users are likely to have experienced more favorable socioeconomic circumstances than nonusers and may thus have greater longevity; a similar disparity may exist between those who used the G.I. Bill for higher education and those who used it for programs below the college level. To the extent that a mortality bias exists, it is likely to have been more pronounced among African-American men, who were not surveyed until a full decade after their average life expectancy had passed. In sum, while white respondents may be slightly more privileged than whites in the original veteran population, black respondents are likely to differ more sharply from the original universe of black veterans.

Archival data presented by Paula Fass allows for comparison of veteran survey respondents’ premilitary level of education to that of black and white soldiers in the World War II military. As expected, black survey respondents generally had far more education prior to military service than did members of the original cohort. While the same holds true of white veterans compared to white soldiers, the difference is more exaggerated in the case of the black veterans. The majority of black survey respondents – 78 percent – had completed high school prior to military service, compared to only 17 percent of the original population. (Among whites, 81 percent of survey respondents had completed high school prior to military service compared to 41 percent of those in the original population.) This fact alone need not thwart the data analysis if each of the subgroups within the data – nonusers, vocational education users, and higher education users – still resemble their original cohort group sufficiently, as was the case among nonblack respondents. Unfortunately, data is not available that would permit such a comparison among African Americans. The proportion that lived in the South in childhood is somewhat less than the proportion of the original population living there in

122. Fass, Outside In, 141.
1947, 50 percent compared to 63 percent. The data here are interpreted cautiously, therefore, considered indicative only of the sample here and not as representative of the original universe of black veterans’ experiences. At the same time, however, the black veteran respondents mirror the white veteran respondents quite closely in terms of their premilitary education, and thus provide the opportunity to compare how similarly situated white and black veterans fared under the G.I. Bill and reacted to it.


Appendix C. Determinants of Use of G.I. Bill for Education or Training: Results of Logistic Regression (Coefficient/Significance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>G.I. Bill Use by Black Veterans</th>
<th>G.I. Bill Use by White Veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Level of Education</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of Living in Childhood, 1920s</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Encouraged</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education before Military Service</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of Birth</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001