Soldiers to Citizens

The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation

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Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal . . . It is for us the living . . . to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced . . . that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion . . . that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

—Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

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Preface

Little did I know when I began the research for this book that it would lead me into the scholarly adventure of a lifetime.

Broadly speaking, I am interested in how particular governing arrangements affect citizens' engagement in public life, and the implications for the vibrancy of democracy. I study American political development, investigating how public policies, once established, have influenced citizens' views about government and their participation in civic and political affairs.

In my first book, I examined this question by probing the extent to which New Deal social and labor policies reached different groups of citizens, and how their rules and procedures affected citizens' relationship to government. My ability to understand citizens' experiences was limited, though, because appropriate sources of evidence simply did not exist. The archival materials and government documents I mined told me much about how political actors and institutions responded to citizens, but little about the reverse.

For my next project, therefore, I decided that I must find a way to learn from citizens themselves about their experiences of a public program. It would make sense, I reasoned, to move somewhat forward in time, so that in addition to using traditional, existing sources, I could also learn from people who had been actual program beneficiaries. After the sweeping policy innovations of the 1930s, the G.I. Bill marked America's next creation of a major public program. To my surprise, I found that this popular law has received relatively little attention from scholars. Somewhat arbitrarily, then, I settled on the G.I. Bill as the subject of my study, and I determined to focus on the impact of its most utilized component, the education and training provisions, on World War II veterans.

Although survey research came into vogue in the 1940s, and numerous surveys were conducted of veterans and of citizens generally during that decade and in the years following, none of them combined questions about G.I. Bill usage and civic and political activity. In order to have the means to examine large patterns of program usage and its effects, I decided that I would need to survey members of the World War II generation myself. Also, to help me understand how individuals experienced the G.I. Bill's benefits and perceived its effects in their own lives, and conversely, why some individuals did not utilize the program, I would conduct a much smaller number of personal, in-depth interviews with veterans, both G.I. Bill users and nonusers.

I began to seek a systematic means of reaching members of the World War II generation who could participate in the survey. Relatives, friends, and colleagues put me in touch with their neighbors, uncles, and fathers who belonged to veterans' groups, and they in turn sent me to organizational leaders, several of whom offered me access to their groups' mailing lists. I also contacted colleges and universities, requesting names and addresses of alumni from the Class of 1949. After many months of such searching and deliberating about which groups might best help generate a representative sample of veterans, and after developing a twelve-page mail survey booklet and testing it with a focus group of veterans in Syracuse, I was ready to conduct the survey. I had become worried, though, about how well this approach would work: survey experts warned me that I would be lucky if 20 percent of the sample responded.

A lively team of graduate students aided me as we assembled the first mailing to over two thousand individuals, stuffing and stamping envelopes deep into the night for several days on end. Every survey was accompanied by a personally addressed letter requesting the recipient's participation, and I signed every one by hand in the admittedly superstitious hope that it would somehow help generate a strong response. Finally, I delivered several boxes full of envelopes to the post office, then settled down to wait.

I didn't have to wait long. Eleven days later, I found a huge stack of return envelopes waiting for me, each one containing a completed survey. As well, I began to receive phone calls from veterans who wanted to tell me firsthand what it had been like to serve in the infantry. One man, after relating stories from the front lines, said, "It's been over fifty years, and I've never told anyone this before." In subsequent days, hundreds and hundreds of return envelopes flooded in. As we opened the mountains of envelopes, we found that several respondents not only had filled out the lengthy survey, which featured over two hundred questions, but also had sent additional materials: long letters telling me more about themselves, clippings from newspapers, and even photographs. After three weeks, when the returns had dwindled, our survey team convened again, to send a new mailing to nonrespondents, a process that we repeated a third and final time another month later. Ultimately, the survey generated a stunning 74-percent response rate, and more than 10 percent of all respondents had done more than send in the survey, whether by enclosing additional materials or contacting me by phone.

In the meantime, I conducted interviews with veterans in all regions of the nation. Before each trip, I would send letters to veterans from the survey lists who lived in the vicinity of wherever I was going, letting them know that I was seeking to learn about veterans' experiences of public programs and involvement in public life after the war, and asking them if they were willing to be interviewed. In each instance, the majority replied and agreed to participate, leaving me to make choices about which offers to accept so that I would meet veterans from a variety of different communities in a given area. I found my way to their apartment buildings, retirement communities, and homes in a wide array of residential neighborhoods. Veterans and their families welcomed me warmly and graciously. Before each interview began, I did not know whether the individual had used the G.I. Bill's education or training benefits. Long before getting to the questions about the program or even military service, I asked each veteran to specify turning points—events, occurrences, or relationships that had changed the subsequent course of his or her life. Each person I interviewed thought carefully before responding. Some mentioned a person who had served as a mentor early in life, or spoke of their spouse of some fifty years; others identified military service or career opportunities. What struck me was that in response to such a personal and probing question, several also mentioned the G.I. Bill, particularly its education and training provisions. Also, though I asked only a few questions about military service, veterans often volunteered much more information about that time in their lives. They pulled out discharge papers, photographs, and Bronze Stars and other medals, and they related memories of training and wartime that they have carried with them throughout their lives. I began to realize how essential it was to understand this part of their stories, which constituted the very basis through which they had become seen as deserving of and eligible for the G.I. Bill. I had not previously had any particular interest in military service, but the more I listened to the veterans, the more respect I gained for what that had meant in their lives, the high price of citizenship they had paid, and how deeply they seemed to care about America.

And that was just the beginning. The next rounds of surveys to additional groups of veterans, in subsequent years, also produced high response rates and brought me more letters and phone calls. The interviews continued to introduce me to people whose voices now echo in my mind. Several of the subjects, sad to say, have died in the years since I first met them, and some have grown incapacitated, but others are flourishing, and they check in with me from time to time to inquire about the progress of the book and to wish me well. Compelling, too, has been the dynamic process of analyzing these rich and different kinds of evidence. The process of discovery has been facilitated by a community of scholars who have encouraged me and prodded me to delve further and to dig deeper to make sense of what I have found. All told, from start to finish, my work on this project has been a privilege and a joy.

Acknowledgments

To say that this book relied upon an army of support is hardly the exaggeration it might seem. My gratitude goes, first of all, to each of the veterans who allowed me to interview them, and the hundreds of veterans and nonveterans from the World War II generation who took the time to respond to the survey. For their willingness to put me in contact with their members, I am thankful to the associational leaders of the 87th, 89th, and 92nd Infantry Divisions of the U.S. Army; the 379th Bombardment Group and the 783rd Bomb Squadron, 465th Bomb Group of the U.S. Army Air Force; and Women in Military Service for America, Inc. Veterans Jim Amor, Albert Burke, Shelby Clark, Elmer Ebrecht, Donald Johnson, Jack Meyer, David Reeher, William Perry, and Richard Werner provided essential assistance, as did Celeste Torian. As well, officials at several institutions responded kindly to my requests and allowed me to contact their Class of 1949 alumni: Boston College, Brooklyn College, Morehouse College, Northwestern University, Pomona College, Syracuse University, University of Georgia, University of Texas, Vanderbilt University, Washington State University, and Wayne State University.

I also gathered materials for this study from a variety of other sources. Michael K. Brown at the University of California at Santa Cruz kindly shared with me critical materials that he unearthed in his own research in the National Archives. Major Darrell Driver at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point responded to my numerous questions with extraordinarily helpful replies. Joe Hovish at the American Legion National Headquarters in Indianapolis offered welcome assistance. Theda Skocpol generously shared with me her approach to classifying organizations, which made possible the analysis in Chapter 7. Joseph Thompson, Undersecretary for

Introduction

Civic Generation

When he was young, Luke LaPorta never imagined that he would attend college, let alone obtain a doctorate. The son of an Italian immigrant, LaPorta grew up in an ethnic neighborhood in Queens, New York. During the Great Depression, his family, like many during that time, struggled to get by, needing public assistance to make ends meet. Although he had been a good student in high school, college seemed entirely out of the question. Nobody in his family or even in his neighborhood had gone: there wasn't the money for it, and it was not something that people like them could even consider. Once LaPorta finished high school, World War II had begun, so he enlisted in the Navy and served aboard a minesweeper that patrolled the Atlantic coast of the United States.

Upon his return from the war, LaPorta had an experience that would profoundly change the course of his life. He accompanied friends from the military on a campus visit to Syracuse University, though having no intention of actually going himself. "It was a lark. We were going to have a lot of fun." While there, the school official who was assisting his friends turned to LaPorta, asked him about his academic record, and then said, "Why don't you come to school here, too? You've got the G.I. Bill!" The words struck LaPorta like a revelation, and he was thrilled and overwhelmed by the idea. He returned home to tell his parents, who shared his excitement. His mother said, "Luke, you go! You can always work!" One week before he was to depart for college, LaPorta's father had an accident and became unable to work. Although LaPorta felt he should stay home and support his parents, they insisted that he seize the opportunity to pursue his education. So, he recalls, "I packed a bag—some

shirts and five or six pairs of socks, and that was it. I was one of the first kids to come [to Syracuse University] on the G.I. Bill."

Over time, LaPorta would earn a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and eventually a doctorate. His education enabled him to attain a standard of living far greater than any his parents might have hoped for. Equally important, LaPorta involved himself to an extraordinary degree in community activities and organizations. He devoted himself to establishing and coaching a vast number of youth sports teams. In 1950, he started the state's first chartered Little League in his own town; over the next decade, he helped develop more than sixty such organizations throughout the region. Time and again, he served as a delegate to Little League Congresses, the international meetings that brought together representatives of local and regional leagues, and then, for fifteen years, he served as chairman of the board of International Little League Baseball, Inc. He became a well-loved and honored member of his community for his decades of public service to young people. Reflecting back over his life, LaPorta credited the G.I. Bill with getting him started, explaining that he could not have afforded college without it, and even more fundamentally, that he had not even thought of himself as capable of pursuing higher education. "It was a hell of a gift, an opportunity, and I've never thought of it any other way," he commented. "Sometimes I wonder if I really earned what I've gotten, to be frank with you."

In recent years, popular books have celebrated the virtues of the generation of Americans who, like Luke LaPorta, were born in the early twentieth century, especially in the 1910s and the 1920s. The hallmark of this literature—exemplified by Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*, Stephen Ambrose's *Citizen Soldiers*, and Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*—is its power to evoke nostalgia and a keen sense that the United States is losing much with the passing of this generation.[1] Yet none of these books explains why those who came of age around the time of World War II exhibited throughout their lives such remarkable commitment to the principles and practices of democracy. Neither have they considered the significance of the intensive government involvement that was so commonplace in the lives of this renowned group of Americans. There is a story that remains to be told about this generation, and it is a story with profound implications for our lives today.

The "greatest generation" is composed of individuals who spent their childhoods in families struggling to survive the Great Depression, and who came of age with World War II. "They answered the call," Brokaw writes, "to help save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs."[2] They included the citizen soldiers—the ordinary citizens charged with the utmost obligation of civic duty, to defend the nation—who stormed the beaches of Normandy, who trekked through the cold European winter of 1944–45 and liberated the concentration camps, and who dug in at Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.[3] They were also the vigilant citizens who stayed behind to defend the home front and support the war effort by working in defense industries, saving scrap metal and rubber, planting Victory gardens to raise their own food, and shopping as conscientious consumers to make sure retailers honored price controls.[4]

Once victory came, the members of this generation participated as active citizens in the peace that followed. They joined civic organizations at record rates, producing what Robert Putnam depicts as a "golden age" of American civic life.[5] A wide array of organizations flourished, including fraternal associations such as the Masons, Elks, Moose, United Methodist Women, and Order of the Eastern Star; service groups including the Lions, Kiwanis, and Rotary; professional associations such as the American Chemical Society and the American Psychological Association; labor unions; and churches and church-affiliated groups.[6] These same young adults involved themselves intensely in political life through voting, party membership, working on political campaigns, and myriad other activities. Bolstered by their participation, voter turnout hit twentieth-century peaks.[7]

Through such intense activity, these Americans earned their reputation as the "civic generation."[8] Their involvement in public life epitomized cherished ideals at the heart of American democracy: widespread participation by ordinary citizens and the articulation of political voice by a broad cross section of the populace. Among towering figures of American political thought, from Thomas Jefferson to Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Martin Luther King Jr., citizens' participation has been considered essential to fulfill the promise of representative government. While popular forms of mass participation have shifted historically, both types in which the World War II generation took part—formal politics and civic associations—have long been viewed as forms of "good citizenship," means whereby ordinary citizens could be part of public life and exert their influence on it.[9] As French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 1830s, a time when only white men were allowed to participate in formal politics, Americans "of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions" exhibit a propensity to "constantly form associations" of all varieties: "not only commercial and industrial . . . but [also] religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute."[10] Throughout American history, these organizations

served as a training ground to prepare adult citizens for participation in democratic politics. They brought citizens together and gave them opportunities to practice collective debate and decision making and to hone their organizing skills. They produced civic leaders by electing officers and committee members who served on a rotating basis, and had responsibility for running group meetings, organizing events, and representing their local chapters at state, regional, or even national meetings.[11] As well, many civic organizations actively encouraged participation in politics and educated their members on public issues. Some advocated for specific forms of legislation, and others formed the front lines of social movements, including the postwar struggle for civil rights.[12] Of course, some citizens circumvented the associational route and jumped directly into politics, whether at the local level or beyond. Through all such forms of involvement, members of the World War II generation helped fortify and invigorate the practices of self-governance.

As the twentieth century proceeded, this remarkable generation remained engaged, even when, by many indicators, democratic well-being in the United States began to show signs of distress. Beginning in the 1970s, Americans began to vote less, to trust each other less, to trust government less, and to disengage from political parties and other forms of political action. The large, federated civic organizations that had thrived at midcentury saw their membership rolls diminish.[13] Interestingly, however, not all citizens were distancing themselves from public life. In fact, members of the generation that had grown up amid the New Deal and World War II remained as involved as ever. Their parents' generation had tended to participate less in public life as they became older; many of their children and especially their grandchildren never became involved in the ways they had from quite early on in their lives. Those in the civic generation proved themselves to be steadfast citizens, keeping organizations alive and electoral turnout levels respectable rather than receding from public life with the aging process and leaving it to the next generations to carry on.[14]

In confronting the lack of civic involvement in contemporary America, we might ask ourselves what made this generation so committed to public life. Some scholars propose that the experiences of uniting for the common good during the war—both in the armed forces and on the home front—may have helped foster the lasting inclination toward civic involvement.[15] This may have been compounded, others reason, by World War II's reputation as the "good war," the most recent war in American memory that was universally understood to be necessary and just. Yet while the emphasis on war is understandable, it fails to serve as a sufficient explanation for the civic generation's high levels of involvement. Wartime brought with it as many factors that could help unravel the civic fabric as ones that could strengthen its fiber. Studies of civic involvement in the latter part of the twentieth century find that, all else equal, veterans generally have not been more active in civic affairs than nonveterans of the same age group.[16] For many, the aspects of military service that induce solidarity were likely offset by the harrowing experiences of warfare. Many veterans returned home with symptoms of an unnamed malady that only decades later became recognized as post-traumatic stress disorder. As well, after having given much of their lives for the public good already, veterans were typically anxious to pursue personal goals and to do so in a hurry. On the home front, the war and especially its aftermath brought massive dislocation of jobs and families. Patterns of relocation already under way in earlier decades hastened as families moved in vast numbers from farms to cities, from East to West, and from South to North. Newcomers did not easily become involved in their new communities, and tensions emerged between old and new populations.[17] All told, the experience of the war and its aftermath fail to explain adequately why the generation that emerged from them became so public-spirited. This book entertains an alternative explanation.

Rather than focusing exclusively on how members of the civic generation experienced war, we might turn our attention to their experiences of government. They lived through the formative years of childhood and early adulthood at precisely the time when national government was becoming more involved in citizens' lives than ever before, particularly in the realm of social provision.[18] For the first hundred years after the drafting of the Constitution, American citizens had looked primarily to their state and local governments to define the scope of their rights and responsibilities. The limits of states' governing capacity combined with the Supreme Court's insistence that states refrain from intervening in economic affairs meant that early on, states did little to ensure the economic security of individuals and families. Adults who fell upon difficult times had to rely on their extended families or church congregations; in the absence of such support, they could be relegated to the local poorhouse and lose their children to an orphanage.[19] Meanwhile, the national government involved itself primarily in activities far from most citizens' lives: facilitating internal improvements such as roads, canals, bridges, and post offices, setting subsidies and tariffs, protecting patents, and issuing a common currency.[20] After the Civil War, the national government began to affect citizens' lives more directly through pensions to veterans and their widows; by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, these pensions had become generous and expansive, reaching 18 percent of the U.S. population age sixty-five and

over.[21] Still, the nascent social programs of the 1910s and 1920s, geared toward mothers and their children, were established primarily at the state and local levels.[22]

Only with the New Deal—through policies enacted as members of the civic generation climbed through the middle years of childhood and became teenagers—did national government begin to affect directly the lives of vast numbers of citizens, across all age groups. In the worst years of the Depression, millions of the unemployed found work through relief programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and many people saw electricity come to their communities for the first time through the Tennessee Valley Authority. Families began to see their well-being enhanced by major new social programs established by the Social Security Act of 1935 (including unemployment insurance, Aid to Dependent Children, and programs for the elderly) and by labor policies (namely, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which sanctioned unionization, and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which mandated the minimum wage and overtime pay). Citizens witnessed national government working on their behalf, ensuring their economic security and well-being and protecting them from what President Franklin D. Roosevelt termed the "vicissitudes" of private life, the uncertainties of the marketplace, and the inability of families to care for their own amid such travails.[23]

Once they reached the age of eighteen, the vast majority of men of the civic generation—and some women as well—answered the call of duty and began their military service. Certainly in the war itself, they witnessed government assuming a powerful role. But it was after they returned home that they encountered what has become known as a landmark public policy, the G.I. Bill of Rights. Formally called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the law extended numerous social benefits to returning veterans of World War II. Any veteran who received a discharge status other than dishonorable after at least ninety days of service qualified for extensive unemployment benefits, low-interest guaranteed loans to buy a home, farm, or business, and financial assistance to pursue additional education or training. Until they found a job, veterans could qualify for unemployment benefits of $20 a week for up to one year; the average veteran used only 19.7 weeks' worth of the "52-20 Club," as the program was called, with only 14 percent exhausting their full entitlement. Twenty-nine percent took advantage of the loan guarantee provisions: 4.3 million purchased homes at low interest rates, and 200,000 purchased farms or businesses. The construction industry received an enormous boost: by 1955, nearly one-third of new housing starts nationwide owed their backing to the Veterans Administration.[24]

Of course, when most people think of the G.I. Bill they think of its education and training benefits, and with good reason: 51 percent of World War II veterans, a total of 7.8 million, took advantage of them. Indeed, the usage rates for those provisions far surpassed the program creators' greatest expectations. By 1947, veterans accounted for 49 percent of students enrolled in American colleges. Ten years after World War II, 2.2 million veterans had attended college under the law's provisions. And for every veteran who used the G.I. Bill to attend college, more than twice as many—a total of 5.6 million—seized the opportunity to acquire training below the college level.[25] By attending G.I. Bill–financed vocational or business schools or by utilizing the bill's subsidy of apprenticeships, on-the-job training, or on-the-farm training, they gained preparation and credentials for a wide array of occupations.

Among the beneficiaries of such programs was Sam Marchesi, who had an eighth-grade education. He had dropped out of school after his father died in order to help support his mother and eight siblings. The war began a few years later, and Marchesi enlisted in the Army. Sent to the Pacific theater, he served in Australia, China, and finally the Philippines. During the invasion of Manila, he was badly wounded in battle, earning a Purple Heart. While Marchesi recuperated, Red Cross nurses urged him to use the G.I. Bill to develop new skills for supporting himself after the war. He used the benefits both for vocational training in architectural drawing and estimating and for on-the-job training as an apprentice carpenter. It enabled him to become a successful custom builder. "I think it was a great thing that the government did, to give us this opportunity to pick up where we left off," he commented. "We had to face the world. We had to make a living. Thank God the government had the doors open for us."

The G.I. Bill granted one year of education or training to veterans who had served for at least ninety days, with an additional month of education for each additional month of service, up to a maximum of forty-eight months. All tuition and fees were covered, up to a total of $500 per year—more than any university charged at that time—and veterans received monthly subsistence payments of $75 if single, $105 with one dependent, and $120 with two or more dependents.[26] By 1955, the federal government had spent a total of $14.5 billion—$108 billion in 2002 dollars—for the education and training provisions.[27]

To appreciate the scope of the G.I. Bill's influence, we must consider that among men born in the United States in the 1920s—those of the generation in question—fully 80 percent were military veterans.[28] And unlike veterans of the Vietnam War and today's all-volunteer force, they were broadly representative of the general male population. The majority

of them served in World War II, and over half of that group used the G.I. Bill's education and training provisions; those born later in the 1920s were more likely to have served in the Korean War, and 42 percent of them utilized a new and very similar version of the education and training provisions.[29] Overall, close to half the men of the civic generation took advantage of the education or training benefits of the G.I. Bill.

The central question posed by this book is how this landmark public program, one so widely experienced among men of the civic generation, might have affected beneficiaries' involvement in the practices of democratic citizenship. Answering this question is complicated by the fact that despite the G.I. Bill's popular reputation as a highly successful program, we know surprisingly little about even its first-order effects, meaning the scope of its coverage and the depth of its socioeconomic impact.[30] To be sure, the bill's higher education provisions in particular have been lauded, cited as the source of vast social change on the presumption that they expanded access to advanced education for over two million Americans.[31] But evidence for such claims has been surprisingly rare.[32] Several studies have shown that veterans enjoyed academic and occupational success after the war that surpassed that of nonveterans, but they neglected to isolate the effects of the G.I. Bill in producing such success.[33] A few scholars have evaluated selected effects of the G.I. Bill, such as educational attainment.[34] The most comprehensive of these studies found an increase in formal schooling of nearly three years among beneficiaries of the G.I. Bill's higher education provisions.[35] However, these studies are limited in their ability to explain the determinants of program usage, leaving it unclear whether the provisions were genuinely accessible to the average veteran. They also tend to overlook entirely the effectiveness of the subcollege programs, which did not extend educational attainment as it is typically measured but did enhance job skills.[36] And inquiry into the G.I. Bill's impact on subsequent participation in civic and political life—the focus of this study—has been practically nonexistent.[37] Despite the fact that historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. singled out the bill as "the most underrated national turning point" because it "contributed enormously to the release of economic and intellectual energy that carried postwar America to the summit of the world," and management guru Peter Drucker identified it as the single factor most responsible for transforming the United States into a "knowledge society," we know little about the actual effects of this program on the individuals who benefited from it.[38]

Recently, in the absence of comprehensive empirical studies, the education and training provisions of the G.I. Bill have been targeted by scholars attacking what they consider to be wrongheaded popular

"myths" of the program's inclusiveness and democratizing effects. They characterize the policy as inherently elitist and charge that it created new inequalities in American society. Some claim that the G.I. Bill merely bestowed privilege on already privileged veterans, paying the college tuition of those who could have obtained education at their own expense while doing little for veterans from less advantaged backgrounds.[39] As Lizabeth Cohen argues, "The vehicle most often credited with moving working-class Americans into the postwar middle class . . . orchestrated much less social engineering than it promised and has been given credit for."[40] Others argue that it worsened educational inequalities between black and white Americans, and between men and women.[41] These analyses, if valid, would imply that any subsequent effects on beneficiaries' participation in democracy would likely have compounded social and economic disparities with civic and political inequality. However, such claims tend to be based on sketchy evidence, typically anecdotal in nature, or drawn from case studies of selected localities or institutions.

At stake in this book, then, are the record and the reputation of one of the most sweeping programs ever enacted in the United States, with regard to its affect on beneficiaries' life opportunities and whether it made them better citizens. In order to investigate these questions, I needed to use a range of available resources and talk to some veterans myself. Government documents and archival materials illuminated the program's origins and manner of implementation, and existing surveys of veterans provided useful information about their usage of its benefits. No existing materials, however, would permit systematic comparisons of subsequent civic and political involvement of program users versus nonusers. I turned, therefore, to the veterans themselves, collecting surveys from over fifteen hundred members of the World War II generation and conducting in-depth interviews with twenty-eight veterans from all regions of the United States. (For full descriptions of data collection procedures, see Appendices A–D.) Drawing on all of these sources, I have put the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits to the test, assessing the program's effects on veterans' subsequent participation in civic and political activities.

My central finding, which this book documents and explains, is that the G.I. Bill's education and training provisions had an overwhelmingly positive effect on male veterans' civic involvement. Those veterans who utilized the provisions became more active citizens in public life in the postwar years than those who did not. Certainly it is not surprising that advanced education would facilitate civic participation; remarkably, however, the program's effects transcended the impact of education itself. Comparing two nonblack male veterans who grew up in the same

socioeconomic circumstances and who attained the same level of education, the individual who used the G.I. Bill belonged to 50 percent more civic organizations and participated in 30 percent more political activities and organizations than the nonrecipient.[42] Beneficiaries became more intensely involved in public life, in activities long considered to be critical to self-governance and therefore the lifeblood of American democracy.[43]

How can we explain these positive effects of the G.I. Bill's education and training provisions on democratic participation? What was it about this policy that made it reap consequences in the realm of civic life? The answer lay in its fundamental inclusivity, magnanimity, and life-transforming power among male veterans. These attributes were reflected, in part, through the value of the education and training it financed, which were praised by veterans for their impact on their lives, and also through the rules and procedures by which it was administered. Veterans commonly responded that the benefits of the bill were generous and accessible and that they felt treated with respect, on terms equal to those of other veterans, regardless of their class, race, or religious background. Importantly, their deservingness for the generous benefits was considered to be beyond question, given that through their military service they had put themselves in harm's way for the sake of the nation. In turn, by experiencing treatment as "first-class" citizens in the program, beneficiaries became more fully incorporated as members of the citizenry and thus developed a stronger predisposition to assume the roles of active participants within it. Subsequently, in the postwar era, G.I. Bill beneficiaries from across the spectrum of educational attainment participated at higher levels in civic and political activities than would otherwise have been expected.

For some, such as Luke LaPorta, such involvement took the form of membership and leadership in mainstream civic organizations—in his case, Little League, Babe Ruth, and numerous community sports organizations. Others mobilized to challenge the status quo. Henry Hervey, an African American and a former Tuskegee Airman, used the G.I. Bill to gain a bachelor's degree at Northwestern University. Afterward, however, he found the job market to be as pervaded by racial discrimination as ever. "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: it was either a janitor or a mailroom clerk." Following the positive experience of the G.I. Bill and having gained the skills fostered by the education it financed, Hervey joined those who mobilized to change the system. "By that time you learn you can fight city hall, and you have to fight, and there are ways you can bring pressure to make changes." Black G.I. Bill users, in fact, became a major impetus within the emergent civil rights movement.

The inclusivity of the G.I. Bill did have limits.[44] Women, who were not drafted, constituted just 2 percent of the armed forces in World War II, and though the G.I. Bill was available to female veterans, they used it at somewhat lower rates because advanced education fit less neatly with their gender roles in the postwar era than it did with men's. More important, the exclusion of the vast majority of women from the program, given that they were civilians, widened the gender divide in educational attainment. In turn, the incorporation of a generation of men into the polity exacerbated the gender gap in active citizenship, highlighting the power of government programs to stimulate the participation of some groups relative to others.

Nonetheless, just as the G.I. Bill transformed the lives of veterans who used it, they in turn helped to change America. Prior to the war, advanced education had been restricted predominantly to the privileged, especially to white, native-born, elite Protestants. The social rights offered by the G.I. Bill broadened educational opportunity to veterans who were Jewish or Catholic, African American, and immigrants as well as to those whose families had struggled in the American working class for generations. Once G.I. Bill beneficiaries became active citizens, they altered the civic landscape of the United States, helping to make the political system yet more inclusive and egalitarian during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

In suggesting that a public program enhanced participation in American democracy, this book is at odds with prevailing views about the relationship between government and civic involvement. Indeed, over the last quarter century, as citizens' activity and interest in public affairs have waned, political leaders have argued that modern government itself might deserve the blame. The "welfare state," including many of the social policies of the New Deal, has borne the brunt of such criticism on the grounds that it fosters dependency among recipients, thus undermining their sense of civic obligation, and that it substitutes for institutions of civil society, such as churches and voluntary associations, thus weakening them.[45] While such ideas had percolated in American politics since the early 1960s, it was President Ronald Reagan who lent national prominence to the new public philosophy, announcing in his first inaugural address in 1981, "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." His administration proceeded to act on such principles by cutting taxes and reducing spending on social programs, except those for the elderly.[46] Next, President George H. W. Bush suggested that government agencies emasculate the vibrancy of civil society

and called instead for "a thousand points of light," voluntary efforts by Americans to care for those in need.

The demise of previously secure public programs has become, over time, more politically feasible. Some have deteriorated due to neglect, as in the case of the minimum wage, food stamps, Pell grants, and unemployment insurance, where policy makers have failed to maintain the real value of benefits harmed by inflation.[47] Other programs have faced more serious restructuring, as in the case of welfare, which was fundamentally altered under the terms of 1996 legislation signed into law by President Bill Clinton, and potentially Social Security, which President George W. Bush hopes to transform into a system that includes private, individual retirement accounts. While the events of September 11, 2001 stimulated new support for government involvement in citizens' lives for the purposes of national security, skepticism about the effectiveness of social programs persists.

Yet claims that government programs undermine good citizenship still remain unsubstantiated by solid evidence. In fact, most scholarship proceeds in a manner disconnected from public discourse about how government programs may influence civic engagement.[48] Thus, despite the growth of social spending over the twentieth century, we know little about whether core programs have fostered active involvement in public life or complacency, or whether they have promoted public-spiritedness or selfish individualism.[49]

Arguably, to the extent that government programs and regulations have become a more important part of everyday life, they may have critical effects—for good or for ill—on citizens' attitudes about government and their participation in the political system.[50] First, the sheer amount of resources distributed by government is likely to influence civic engagement.[51] Today the U.S. government spends 15.8 percent of the gross domestic product on public social expenditures, facilitating a considerable infusion into citizens' lives.[52] Whether these resources are distributed in the form of dollar payments or as goods and services such as food, education, or health care, they have implications for beneficiaries' material well-being and life opportunities, and thus in turn are likely to influence their rate of civic involvement. Greater resources—particularly advanced education—tend to lead individuals to employment and social situations in which they develop greater civic skills and social networks, thus elevating their capacity for participation in public life.[53] As well, policy resources may boost civic engagement if they increase citizens' sense that government is for and about people like them and that they have a stake in government, prompting them to mobilize politically.[54] Andrea Campbell found Social Security and Medicare to have such "resource effects" on beneficiaries' political participation, boosting involvement particularly among those with low incomes given that they are especially reliant on the program benefits.[55]

As well, public policies offer citizens routine, day-to-day encounters with government and are likely to constitute their most personal and informative experiences of government in action.[56] These seemingly mundane experiences are likely to be more instructive about citizens' relationship to government and their status within the polity than are their far less frequent visits to the voting booth, almost nonexistent encounters with elected officials, and impersonal sound bites of political advertising. Citizens attain penetrating messages from government, for example, when they fill out their tax forms every April, wait for a monthly Social Security check, apply for unemployment insurance, or consider how the perceived quality of their local public school affects the market value of their home.[57] Their perceptions of a policy's fairness, its effectiveness, and its value in their life are significant, then, because they may derive, on that basis, their view about government's general responsiveness toward people like them.[58] Joe Soss found that Social Security disability insurance, with its routinized procedures, elevates recipients' sense that government is responsive to people like them, while Aid to Families with Dependent Children, through which recipients encountered nonresponsive agencies, had the opposite effect.[59] As well, program beneficiaries may acquire a sense of their own status in the polity, of how people like them are regarded—for instance, with respect or with stigma—and the extent to which they are included among the citizenry.[60] Program messages may be diffused, of course, if benefits are designed in a way that makes government's role less visible; Jacob Hacker argues that employer-financed health and pension plans cultivate little public activism given that their design obscures the public subsidies that help finance them.[61] Ultimately, to the extent to which such "interpretive" or "cognitive" effects are conveyed by policies, they may influence citizens' psychological predisposition or inclination to civic engagement, and thus in turn affect the extent to which citizens later participate in civic and political activities.[62]

We now turn to the education and training benefits of the G.I. Bill, to explore how they transformed the soldiers of World War II into active citizens for peacetime democracy. We will probe the significance of the resources they offered—both for higher education and for subcollege training—and the scope of their coverage among veterans, in order to understand how they helped elevate civic participation. We will examine the tenor of the messages the program conveyed to veterans through its rules, procedures, and manner of implementation; how beneficiaries

perceived its inclusivity and its value in their lives; and how such interpretive effects could have been transformed into consequences for civic involvement. Throughout the book, readers will find stories about and quotations from the veterans who were interviewed for the project, who come primarily but not exclusively from the same units as those surveyed; these veterans are identified by pseudonym, or, if they chose, by name.[63] The responses of the survey participants, by contrast, are typically presented as aggregate quantitative results, except in a few cases in which individual written responses from the surveys are presented anonymously.

Beyond its implications for the civic generation, the story of the G.I. Bill bears critical lessons for contemporary policy-making efforts. From the 1970s to the present, Americans have grown increasingly unequal in terms of income and wealth, producing a highly stratified society; also, by several measures, civic engagement has dwindled, particularly among less advantaged citizens. To be sure, those who have more education and income participate at much higher levels, and have greater political power, than those who have less. In this context, the example of a public program of the past that produced egalitarian consequences for both socioeconomic status and civic participation, ameliorating inequalities and fostering engagement, demands serious consideration. It is imperative to understand the means whereby the G.I. Bill had such effects so that we can ponder the implications for policy making today.

1

Creating the G.I. Bill

The end of World War II seemed to signal to Americans at least a moment of relief from a decade and a half of struggle. After the stock market crashed in 1929, unemployment and impoverishment ravaged the nation. The despair they produced hung like a dust cloud that would not abate until, on December 7, 1941, a different crisis emerged. With the attack on Pearl Harbor, a nation long reluctant to enter the growing world war found itself undeniably catapulted into the conflict. Jobs at last became plentiful, but goods grew scarce, and all citizens were asked to do their part to sacrifice and help support the war effort. Most costly of all, nearly every family had to bid farewell to at least one of their own who answered the call to serve the nation in the military, some never to return. When troops stormed the coast of France on D-Day, June 6, 1944, over fourteen hundred Americans were counted among the dead, and casualties mounted as they made their way across Europe. Between mid-December 1944 and early January 1945, the Battle of Ardennes—also known as the Battle of the Bulge—eclipsed the Battle of Gettysburg as the bloodiest event in American history: fifty-five thousand were killed or wounded and eighteen thousand taken prisoner. In the Pacific theater, young Americans engaged in combat on a string of islands with names most had never heard of before; the intensity of warfare culminated in battles on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, where American fatalities totaled nearly twenty thousand. By the time Germany finally surrendered in May, followed by Japan in August, the United States had suffered over one million dead or wounded—more than in any other war in which Americans have participated before or since.[1]

As much as the nation yearned for peace, its arrival brought new anxieties. Experts warned that the servicemen returning home had

undergone profound changes since they went away to war.[2] "He may have lost an arm or a leg," explained the surgeon general of the U.S. Army, Major General Norman T. Kirk. "His face or head may be disfigured. He may be a nervous wreck from battle fatigue and labeled psychoneurotic or psychotic."[3] Citizens also worried that the economy would slump back into a depression. It seemed inconceivable that the job market—which had been so fragile until the infusion of government spending for war mobilization—could possibly accommodate fifteen million returning veterans as well as the ten million civilians who had been employed in the war industries. But public officials had already considered postwar challenges and had made plans in advance, with the enactment of the G.I. Bill—otherwise known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.[4]

Today, it would seem reasonable to assume that the G.I. Bill was an extension of New Deal largesse, created for the explicit purpose of broadening access to education and facilitating movement into the middle class.[5] In fact, that was hardly the case. Though created soon after the New Deal, the G.I. Bill came about at a time when the social democratic momentum and spirit of reform associated with the period had already subsided.[6] By the early 1940s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had distanced himself from most domestic policy-making efforts, concentrating on his role as "Dr. Win the War" rather than as "Dr. New Deal."[7] Congress had grown increasingly conservative, and interest in social legislation had declined sharply.[8]

Certainly public officials in the most progressive corner of the Roosevelt administration, the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), did hope that the end of the war would provide the opportunity in which to expand further the New Deal vision of social rights for all citizens. Their call to arms was articulated by Roosevelt in his "Four Freedoms" speech in 1941—famously memorialized by Norman Rockwell's illustrations—which declared that the nation should guarantee to all Americans not only "freedom of speech and expression," "freedom from fear," and "freedom of worship," but also "freedom from want."[9] The NRPB carried the torch for this ambitious agenda and, focusing particularly on the last component, issued several reports that outlined bold plans for the postwar economy. The board set as a goal nothing less than "the fullest possible development of the productive potential of all of our resources, material and human, with full employment, continuity of income, [and] equal access to minimum security and living standards."[10] Most significant, the NRPB prioritized expanded access to education as a key objective, arguing that it was "essential for the exercise of citizenship in a democratic society."[11]

If the National Resources Planning Board had prevailed, we might consider the G.I. Bill as a policy intended to expand opportunities for all citizens to attain advanced education. That was not the case, however. For all its ebullient prose, the board's political star never shone very brightly, and it—as well as prospects that broad postwar plans might emanate from the Roosevelt administration—grew dimmer as the war proceeded. In fact, when NRPB head Frederick Delano urged the president to authorize planning for demobilization, Roosevelt hedged, saying, "This is no time for a public interest in or discussion of post-war problems—on the broad ground that there will not be any post-war problems if we lose this war."[12] Subsequent NRPB reports, when released to the public, were castigated by journalists and conservative groups around the nation as "fascist" and "socialist." Then, in the spring of 1943, Congress voted to terminate the board's funding, thus silencing the voices of those in the Roosevelt administration who advocated broad-based social provision in the postwar era.[13]

In the absence of the NRPB, postwar planners were motivated by the narrower and more practical goal of reincorporating returning veterans into society and, not least, by fears of social unrest. The experience of World War I veterans, who had gained little by way of government benefits, loomed in their memories: early in the Depression, during the Hoover administration, thousands of disgruntled and destitute veterans from all over the country had mobilized to march on Washington in pursuit of immediate compensation. In an incident that shocked and embarrassed the nation, federal troops, summoned by Hoover and led by General Douglas MacArthur, ran the ragtag "Bonus Army" out of town.[14] Policy makers hoped to avoid a repeat of such events by ensuring from the start that veterans of World War II would receive better treatment. They aimed, further, to "solve the bottlenecks and to get around difficulties" implicit in demobilization, to circumvent the possibilities for a return to massive unemployment rates, and at the same time to correct for educational shortages in particular occupations that had been created by the war.[15]

Public officials were also genuinely concerned about enabling veterans to retool themselves for active citizenship in peacetime. As Roosevelt himself put it when submitting the administration's proposal to Congress, "We must replenish our supply of persons qualified to discharge the heavy responsibilities of the postwar world. We have taught our youth how to wage war; we must also teach them how to live useful and happy lives in freedom, justice, and democracy."[16] Diverting veterans away from the job market and toward educational

institutions and training programs appeared to constitute a possible means of addressing all of these concerns simultaneously.

Through a surprising series of events and highly paradoxical politics, the law that emerged, while limited to veterans only, was nonetheless striking for its generosity, inclusivity, and provision of social opportunity. These attributes owed not to the efforts of the ostensibly progressive Roosevelt administration, which ultimately offered only modest proposals that would have granted education to very few veterans. Rather, it was the American Legion, an organization that had a conservative reputation and had tended previously to be skeptical of public programs, that put forward the far more sweeping proposal of the G.I. Bill, then mobilized the political support necessary to its enactment.[17]

The G.I. Bill bore less resemblance to New Deal legislation—which tended to target citizens as workers—than to an older American tradition of social provision geared for citizen soldiers. In the democratic ideals so central to the nation's identity, military service had long been regarded as the utmost obligation of masculine citizenship, and the protection of the nation by ordinary citizens, as opposed to a standing army, was considered essential to maintaining self-governance.[18] In the words of George Washington, "It may be laid down as a primary position, and the basis of our system, that every Citizen who enjoys the protection of a free Government, owes not only a proportion of his property, but even of his personal services to the defence of it."[19] From the period following the Revolutionary War onward, the United States recognized those who rose to this demand of civic duty by granting increasingly generous pensions to veterans and their dependents. Initially these programs targeted only disabled veterans, but in 1890, Congress extended Civil War pensions to those who had non-service-related disabilities and to the families of deceased veterans. By the beginning of the twentieth century, such pensions had become fairly generous and widespread.[20]

Yet the G.I. Bill also represented a departure from the specific design of these prior veterans' programs. Over time, the Civil War pensions had earned a poor reputation among Progressive reformers, who associated them with corruption. They were delivered through the patronage system of party politics, which permitted a high degree of discretion to local politicians, who could in practice control the timing and targeting of benefits for political purposes.[21] With World War I, policy makers sought to create benefits that would be less expensive, less open to potential abuse, and more oriented toward the promotion of self-reliance among veterans. Rather than disability pensions, they offered veterans of the Great War merely the option of purchasing low-cost insurance, and established vocational programs and medical and hospital

care for disabled veterans only.[22] This was the approach that veterans viewed as so miserly; it generated repeated demands for outright pension payments and ultimately led to the notorious treatment of the Bonus Army during the Hoover administration.

From the outset, the Roosevelt administration responded more graciously to veterans but embraced a new policy approach. President Roosevelt made his position clear when he addressed the American Legion in 1933: "No person, because he wore a uniform, must thereafter be placed in a special class of beneficiaries over and above all other citizens. The fact of wearing a uniform does not mean that he can demand and receive from his Government a benefit which no other citizen receives."[23] By executive order, he eliminated some veterans' benefits and scaled back others, instead advancing legislation that made jobs available to thousands—veterans and nonveterans alike—in the Civilian Conservation Corps and later in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.[24] Then the New Deal proceeded, through its core pieces of social and labor legislation, to expand American social rights by bestowing them primarily on citizen workers.[25]

Once World War II was under way, the combination of Roosevelt's lack of enthusiasm for social provision limited to veterans, his focus on the war, and the withering influence of the NRPB explain why his administration offered plans for postwar veterans' benefits only in strikingly restrictive terms. First the administration's Conference on Post-War Readjustments of Civilian and Military Personnel, known as the PMC, proposed higher education benefits that would be contingent upon competitive examinations and thus restricted to a relatively small number of veterans; then it suggested that permissible programs of study should be limited to those deemed directly relevant to occupations in need of trained personnel.[26] This narrow articulation represented the confluence of viewpoints of PMC members, both the fiscal conservatism of the military officials and the cautiousness of higher education leaders about opening too widely the doors of the academy, to which few outside of the elite had access at the time.[27] A second committee, the Armed Forces Committee on Postwar Educational Opportunities for Service Personnel (called the Osborn Committee for its chairman, Brigadier General Frederick H. Osborn), made the elitist approach even more explicit. It proposed that all veterans who had served for at least six months would be able to have one year of education or training, but only a "limited number of exceptionally able ex-service personnel" who demonstrated "unusual promise and ability"—just a hundred thousand—would be assisted in pursuing education beyond one year, and their aid would combine a mix of grants and loans.[28] Roosevelt transmitted this latter plan to Congress

in the fall of 1943, where it was sponsored by Senator Elbert D. Thomas of Utah, a former political science professor and loyal New Dealer who was chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor.

At this same juncture, the American Legion, a veterans' organization created in 1919, after World War I, and which by the mid-1940s had three million members in local posts across the nation and abroad, began its focus on postwar planning.[29] No doubt the Legion—both then and now—is best known for its promotion of patriotism in local communities and its involvement in community service, particularly through the support of local youth baseball leagues, Boys' State and Boys' Nation events, and Boy Scout organizations. When it came to politics, the Legion had assumed a conservative, antistatist posture. Unlike the Veterans of Foreign Wars, it had refused to lend full support to "bonus" payments for the able-bodied during the 1920s, and during the Depression, it promoted voluntary provision of aid by local Legion posts rather than expanded government benefits.[30] The Legion would have appeared an unlikely suspect for the creation and promotion of landmark social legislation.

Yet remarkably, in a period of just a few weeks, the Legion's special committee charged with planning veterans' legislation produced what became known as the G.I. Bill. John Stelle, former governor of Illinois, "a big, fighting, bulk of a man" and a leader in the American Legion, received a letter from his son in the military that described what those with whom he served hoped for after the war: "All they wanted was an opportunity from their Government to make good when they returned . . . ; an opportunity to get education or training, and to find work." This prompted him to suggest to the Legion's Executive Committee, in November 1943, the core ideas of the G.I. Bill.[31] The organization set to work, and just two months later, in January 1944, Senator Joel Bennett Clark of Missouri, one of the founders of the American Legion, introduced the organization's proposal to Congress. The speedy time frame was made possible by the Legion's ability to draw liberally on the efforts of committees and experts whose plans had begun years earlier, most notably on the Roosevelt administration's bill, which had just been considered in hearings in the Senate.[32]

But while the Legion's bill essentially replicated much of the administration's overall framework, it was the civic organization's leaders who endowed the G.I. Bill with its hallmark features, pushing vigorously for provisions that were significantly more generous and inclusive.[33] Whereas the administration's version entitled veterans to one year of education and permitted only a small percentage with "exceptional ability and skill" to receive additional training, contingent on passage of competitive examinations, the Legion-inspired bill, by contrast, offered up to four years of funding—contingent on length of service—to any veteran whose education had been interrupted.[34] The one year of guaranteed education offered by the administration's bill was promised only to those who had served at least six months, while the Legion plan offered educational benefits for all who had served at least ninety days.[35]

The Legion's G.I. Bill Committee worked intensely over a one-month period from mid-December to mid-January. Chairman Stelle stood at a large blackboard and wrote down the ideas of all in the room, which were then "kept, revised, or erased after prolonged discussion and debate."[36] The actual drafting of the bill's language fell to Legion official Harry Colmery, a lawyer from Topeka, Kansas, who, in Stelle's phrase, "jelled all our ideas into words."[37] The organization's acting director of public relations, a former newspaperman named Jack Cejnar, read the draft proposal and shrewdly dubbed it "a bill of rights for G.I. Joe and G.I. Jane." Within a few days, the name was shortened to the catchy "G.I. Bill of Rights," and publicity about the proposal began to spread.[38]

Over the next six months, the American Legion proceeded—through its vast grassroots network and public relations apparatus—to marshal critical and widespread support for the G.I. Bill. Newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, acting on his personal interest in veterans' welfare, offered the Legion the assistance of three of his top reporters for the duration of the legislative battles. Besides writing feature articles, the trio canvassed members of Congress as to their positions on the bill and rallied American Legion members throughout the nation to exert pressure on those expressing indecision or opposition. The national organization mailed packets to all local posts offering them materials to help their members write letters to Congress, appear on radio talk shows in support of the legislation, organize petition drives, and encourage local journalists to write articles about the legislation. The Women's Auxiliary for the Legion joined in all such efforts. The national staff prepared a motion picture clip and sent it to local theaters around the country, and rank-and-file members barraged Congress with telegrams. The G.I. Bill quickly gained far more widespread popular support than the Roosevelt administration's plans for veterans had ever garnered.[39]

Although the Senate acted quickly, approving the Legion's bill by late March, progress slowed in the House of Representatives. There, John E. Rankin of Mississippi, chair of the Committee on World War Veterans' Legislation, argued that the educational provisions of the bill would allow federal authorities to intervene in state and local affairs. He was distrustful of higher education, certain that it yielded an "overeducated and undertrained" population, and he announced, "I would rather send

my child to a red schoolhouse than to a red school teacher."[40] He saved his most vitriolic disdain for the unemployment provisions of the bill, and it was in those criticisms that it became clear that Rankin feared that the legislation threatened the racial order: "We have 50,000 negroes in the service from our State, and in my opinion, if the bill should pass in its current form, a vast majority of them would remain unemployed for at least a year."[41] The committee finally approved, and the House passed, a version of the bill that was narrower and more restrictive than the Senate's version, leading to another round of contentious proceedings in conference committee. Once again, Rankin impeded the process. Finally, in a dramatic eleventh-hour series of events, Legion officials, assisted by political leaders, managed to contact Congressman John Gibson, a committee member who had gone home to Georgia because he was ill, and arranged for a local Legionnaire to drive him to a waiting plane so that he could get to Washington in time to break the deadlock at the committee's final meeting.[42] The conference version was swiftly approved by both houses, and on June 22, 1944, President Roosevelt signed the bill into law.

Throughout the politics surrounding the G.I. Bill's passage, proponents articulated vigorous arguments about the policy's relationship to American citizenship. Importantly, these claims were voiced not as progressive demands for all citizens to enjoy broader access to economic security and welfare.[43] Rather, supporters promoted the social rights in the legislation by observing their connection to civic obligations. They stressed that potential recipients were deserving because they had already performed the ultimate act of participatory citizenship through military service. Legion official Harry Colmery explained, "We recognize that the burden of war falls upon the citizen soldier, who has gone forth, overnight, to become the answer and hope of humanity; we seek to preserve his rights, to see that he gets a square deal."[44] Equally important, supporters emphasized that the policy would enable veterans to become more active citizens in the day-to-day workings of democracy in the postwar era. As the Legion's national commander, Warren Atherton, noted, "However great may be the service of the men and women who have served on the battlefields or home front in this war, an even greater obligation will face them when peace returns. . . . The continuing duty of citizenship is to apply the lessons of this war to the establishments of a better and stronger nation. As these veterans have led in war, so must they lead in peace."[45]

Policy makers did not spell out the precise dynamics by which they anticipated that the G.I. Bill's education and training provisions might help foster civic involvement in the postwar world, but the most vocal

among them made clear that they intended and hoped for such outcomes. Harry Colmery told Congress, "Now this educational provision has a much deeper significance. . . . The nation needs the trained mind and body attuned again to the peaceful pursuits of American life, because, trained in the art of destruction of both property and life in every known personal and mechanical method, the nation then will owe an obligation to them. It has to take them back sympathetically away from the horrors and stark reality of war and give them every opportunity to again become disciplined forces for peaceful progress through educational opportunity in its every aspect."[46] Still, Colmery held only modest expectations for the reach of such efforts, noting, "We do not know how many there will be. It is estimated somewhere between 10 and 20 percent." In time, the provisions would reach over 50 percent of all veterans, and former service members' experience of the bill's design, implementation, and socioeconomic effects would yield social and civic consequences beyond those Colmery could ever have imagined.