

The GI. Bill of Rights

Lead: Originally conceived as a way of keeping unemployed ex-servicemen off the streets, the GI Bill transformed the campuses of American colleges.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Fearful that returning veterans would not be able to find jobs after World War II, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. The main feature of the bill was a provision for unemployment benefits at the rate of \$20 per week for a year.

Almost as an afterthought, the bill's sponsors tossed in a section guaranteeing any qualified veteran the chance to attend college for 48 months, at least in part, at government expense.

At the time, few observers dreamed that the prospect of a relatively cheap college education would lure millions of ex-GIs onto campuses for a chance at a better life through education. The first vets were in the program by the summer of 1944, and twelve months later their number had risen to over a million. The first veteran to sign up for the education benefits was Don Balfour of Washington, D.C. He was a student at George Washington University and within two months he

was receiving a stipend for tuition and a monthly living allowance. Balfour went on to become an insurance executive and was joined by millions funded in the first GI Bill, in making a real impact on the professional and economic boom of the post-war era.

The most astounding result of the GI Bill was the transformation it wrought on the college campuses of America. College in the 1930s was a destination of the children of the elite, the wealthy, teachers, and preachers. Suddenly, college was available for people who never expected to be able to go there. Stanford, for instance, more than doubled its enrollment in a single year. Living in rough accommodations such as Quonset huts

with a cold-water tap, life was a primitive affair but many considered the sacrifice worth it.

The first GI Bill cost over 5 billion dollars but it returned value to the economy many times over that figure as newly educated professionals flooded in to the workplace.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Kiester, Edwin, Jr. "Uncle Sam Wants You.....To Go To College," *Smithsonian* 25 (8, November, 1994), 128-142.

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