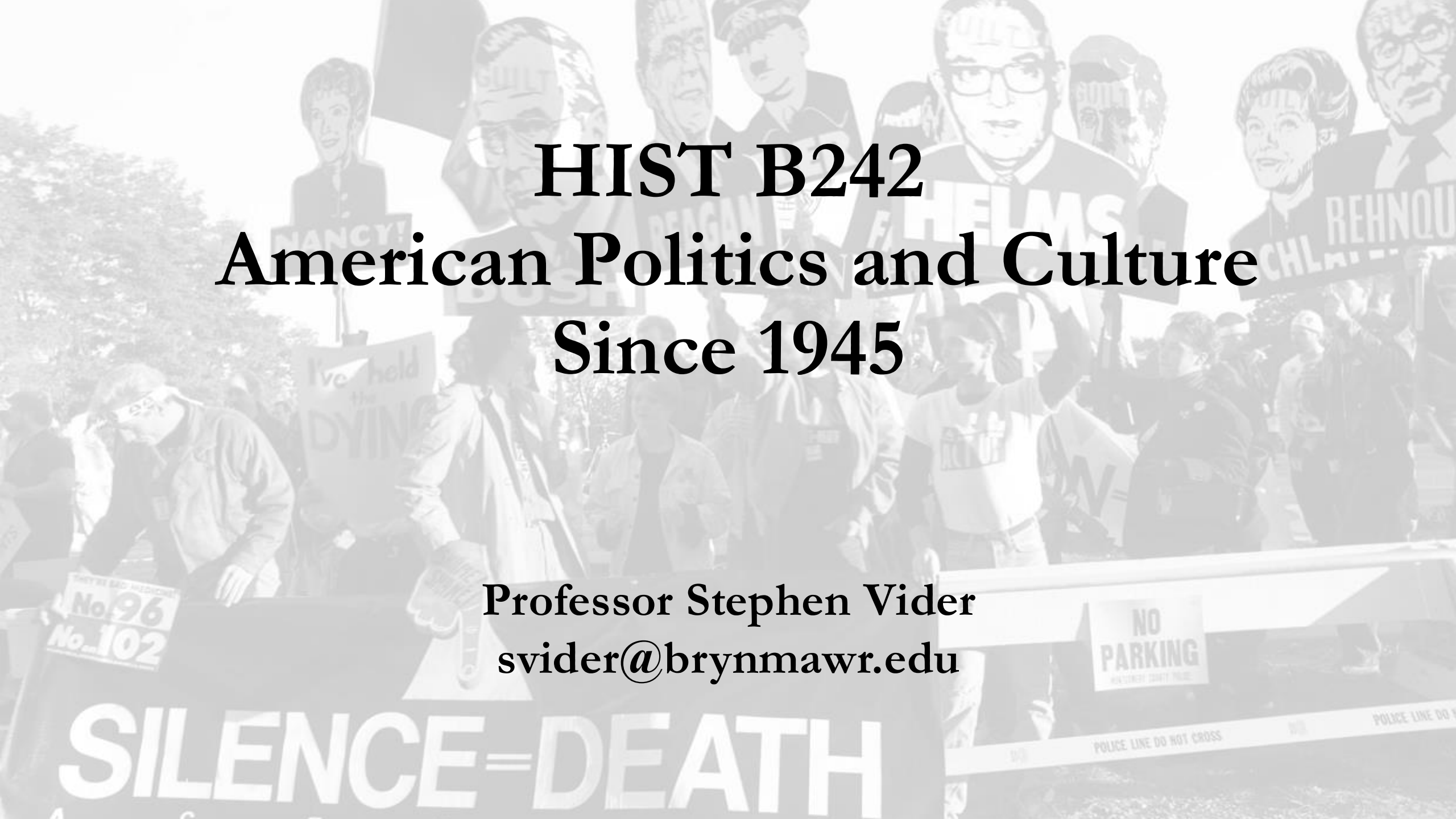
Bryn Mawr College
Professor Stephen Vider
Not for circulation without permission



HIST B242
American Politics and Culture Since 1945

Professor Stephen Vider
svider@brynmawr.edu

Readjustment, Upheaval, and Citizenship After World War II

September 2, 2026

KEY QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

1. In what immediate ways did World War II reshape the United States?

2. In what ways did the G.I. Bill and "readjustment" expand opportunities for economic advancement, and how did they re-introduce more restrictive norms of gender, sexuality, and race?

3. How did the G.I. Bill remake the roles and responsibility of the federal government?

Impacts of World War II

- **16 million men served in U.S. military**

(Total U.S. population in 1945: 139 million)

Scrapbook and photos by Motor Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Caption Edric Costain while serving on PT-305 from 1944-1945.National World War II Museum

Impacts of World War II

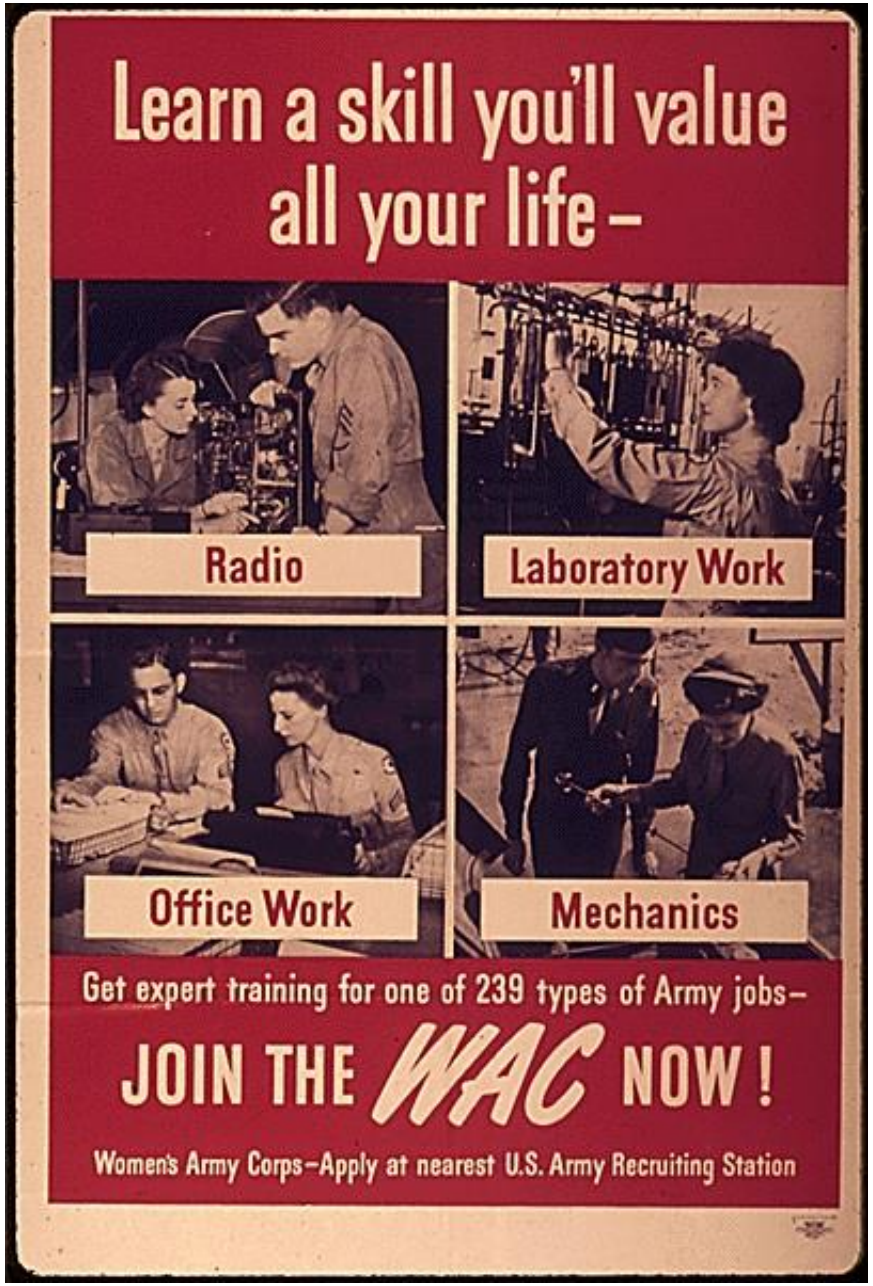
- 16 million men served in U.S. military
- **Included 900,000 African Americans in segregated units**

Soldiers of 93rd infantry Division at Fort Huachuca, Arizona (Pfc. Curtis Griffin, Cleveland, Ohio; Cpl. Tommie Pendergrass, Washington D.C.; and Pvt. Oscar Hawkins, Lancaster, Ohio)

Impacts of World War II

- **300,000 women volunteered for auxiliary units in the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard, starting in 1942 (including ~6500 black women, restricted by quotas)**

"Learn a skill you'll value all your life…
Join the WAC [Women's Army Corps] Now!"



Recruitment poster, c.1942 (Internet Archive)

Officer Charity Adams and members of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, Women's Army Corps (WACS)

Identification

NAME Sonia Hoffman

HOME ADDRESS 918 Penn Ave. No.

CITY Minneapolis STATE Minnesota

AGE 26 RANK Pvt.

SERVICE SERIAL No. A-706726

ENTRY DATE and ORGANIZATION Nov. 10, 1943

First day in the Army was on Nov. 11, 1943 at Ft. Des Moines, Iowa

Member of the WAC's

Scrapbook of Sonia (Sonny) Hoffman, Minneapolis (University of Minnesota)

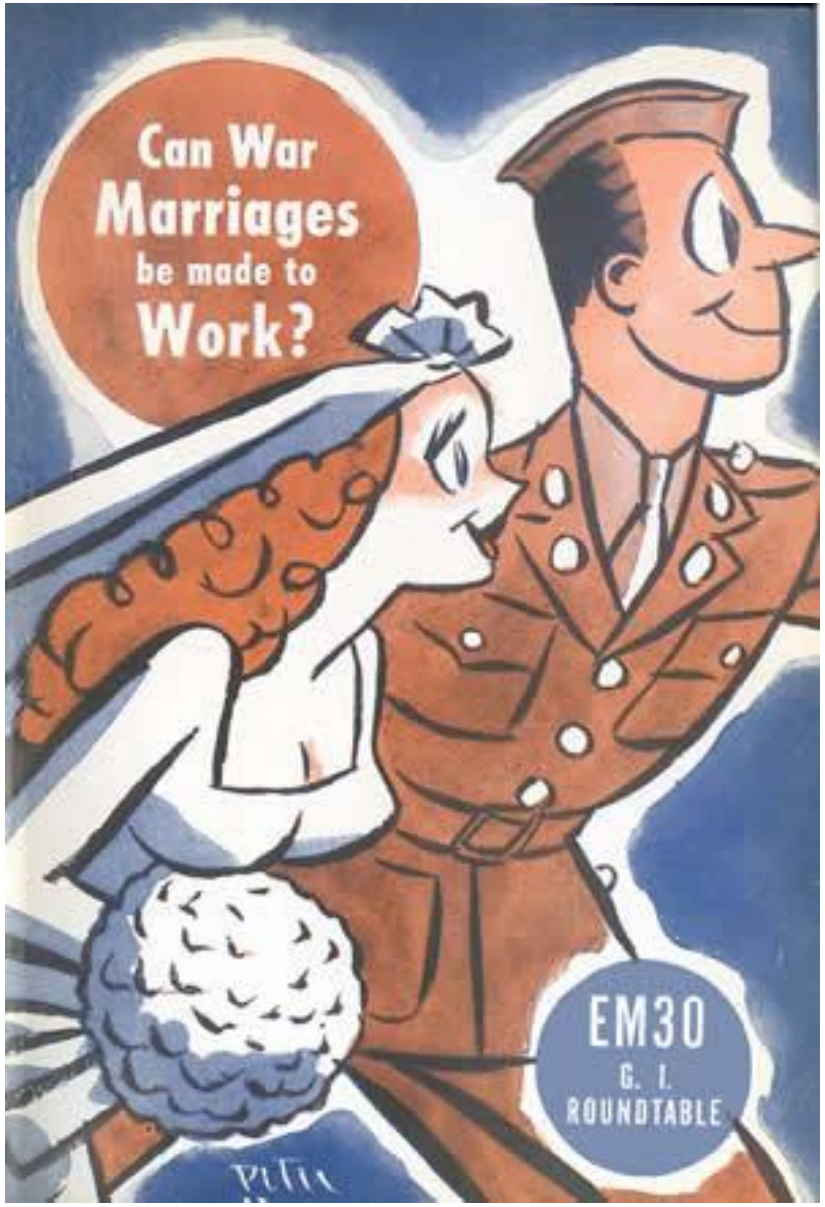
"Foreign Males" and "American Fellows," Scrapbook of Sonia (Sonny) Hoffman, Minneapolis (University of Minnesota)

Unknown American soldiers, photo booth photograph, c. 1944
Source: National World War II Museum

Phyllis Abry and her girlfriend, Mildred, in WAAC publicity photo, Lubbock, Texas, 1944 (Source: National World War II Museum)

“Drivers on the Job,” and dancing at Fort Huachuca, Arizona
Source: Irma Jackson Cayton Werz Collection, UNC Greensboro

Workers at Richmond Shipyard, San Francisco, c. 1943
(Library of Congress)



"Can War Marriages be made to work?" and "Do You Want Your Wife to Work After the War?" G.I. Roundtable pamphlets, 1944

"Do You Want Your Wife to Work After the War?" G.I. Roundtable pamphlets, 1944

"Today women hold one in every three civilian jobs in the country. War has given them new motives, stirred up new problems, brought about new adjustments.

""There are two things I want to be sure of after the war," writes a soldier from the South Pacific. 'I want my wife waiting for me and I want my job waiting for me. I don't want to find my wife busy with a job that some returning soldier needs, and I don't want to find that some other man's wife has my job.'"

When GI Girls Return

WHEN the Wacs, the Waves, the Spars and the lady Marines were first added to our armed forces, opponents to women in uniform raised the bugaboo that the women of America would come out of uniform barking like drill sergeants. They won't be fit companions for civilian men, they'll never settle down to being wives and mothers, and their morals—the arguments would end at this point with a sorrowful shaking of the head.

Those girls who plan to combine marriage and a job talk in terms of working "just for a few years." Some of them are worried about whether their husbands and sweethearts will be able to get jobs when they get back from overseas, and they anticipate having to work for a while to help out.

It is estimated that only 25 per cent of returning service men will want to go back to their pre-war jobs, and it seems probable that even fewer service women will resume their peacetime chores.

Beatrice Berg, "When GI Girls Return"
***New York Times*, April 1945**

When GI Girls Return

WHEN the Wacs, the Waves, the Spars and the lady Marines were first added to our armed forces, opponents to women in uniform raised the bugaboo that the women of America would come out of uniform barking like drill sergeants. They won't be fit companions for civilian men, they'll never settle down to being wives and mothers, and their morals—the arguments would end at this point with a sorrowful shaking of the head.

A survey of Woman's Army Corps members stationed in the New York area indicates that all this headshaking was unnecessary. Being in uniform has not deprived them of their essential femininity nor of their normal desires for husband, home and children. On the contrary it has in many instances convinced the

Those girls who plan to combine marriage and a job talk in terms of working "just for a few years." Some of them are worried about whether their husbands and sweethearts will be able to get jobs when they get back from overseas, and they anticipate having to work for a while to help out.

It is estimated that only 25 per cent of returning service men will want to go back to their pre-war jobs, and it seems probable that even fewer service women will resume their peacetime chores. Girls who held routine clerical jobs or worked as salesgirls or in beauty shops, and even some professional women, have acquired new skills and new ambitions.

Wac Lieut. Madeline Bushman, who used to teach physical education, has had just such an experience. "The Army has taught me things about myself I never knew

Based on Berg's article, what were some of the anxieties that circulated around women volunteers and the end of the war? And to what degree do Berg's interview subjects allay those fears?

Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill), 1944

"To provide Federal Government aid for the readjustment in civilian life of returning World War II veterans"

AN ACT

To provide Federal Government aid for the readjustment in civilian life of returning World War II veterans.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944".

TITLE I

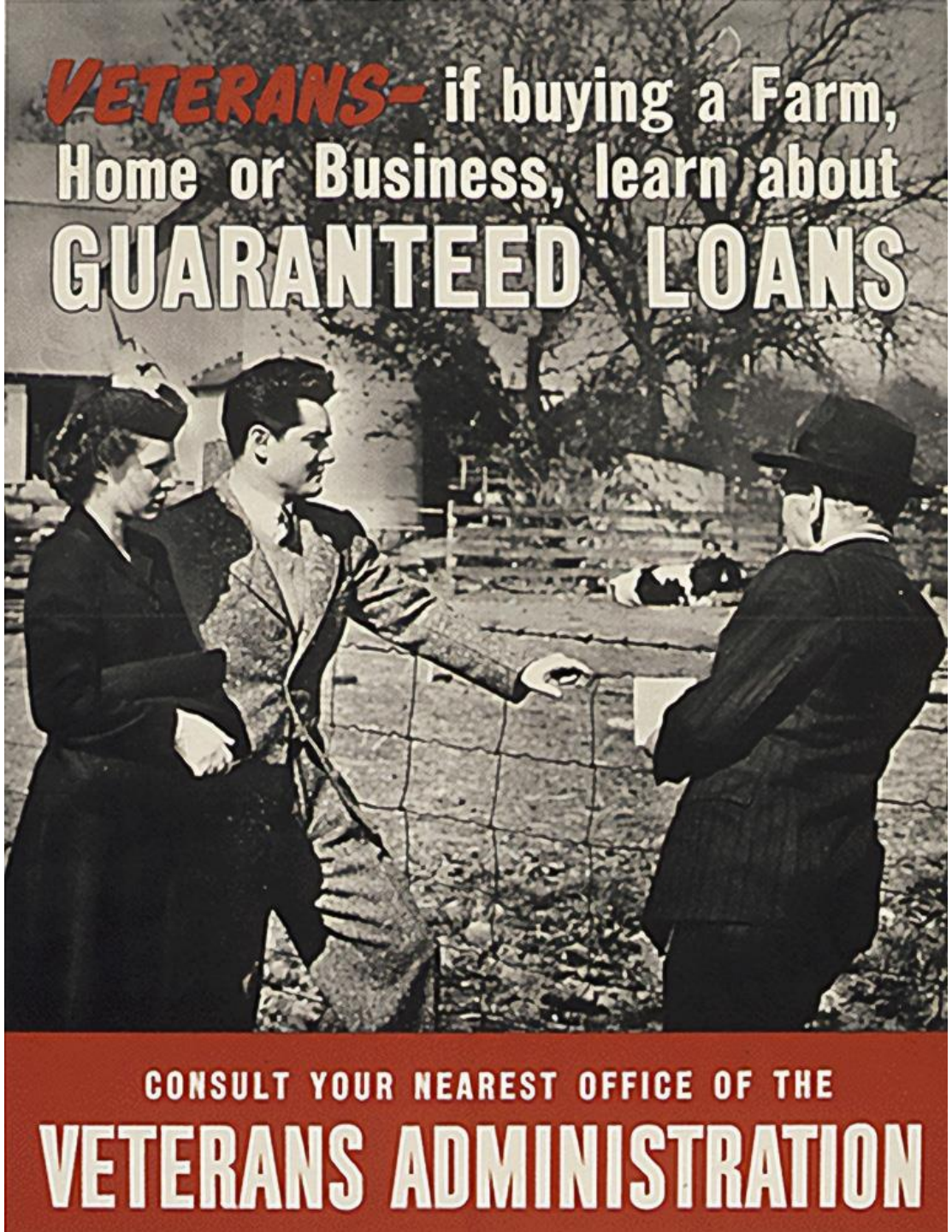
Chapter I—Hospitalization, Claims, and Procedures

Sec. 100. The Veterans' Administration is hereby declared to be

“Shall I Go Back to School?” G.I. Roundtable pamphlets, 1944

Army-Navy Screen Magazine
G.I. Bill of Rights, 1944

Student veteran housing at University of Illinois, 1946
Source: University of Illinois



Source: National Archives

GI Bill and Citizenship as Partnership

Dual responsibilities:
Civic Participation (Citizen)
+ Social Provisions (Government)

New Deal as Precedent

New Deal programs of 1930s under FDR lead to vast expansion of the role ofthe federal government in recovery from Great Depression

- employment programs, like the Works Progress Administration (public works programs)
- social insurance, i.e. Social Security
- farm loans, e.g. Farm Security Administration
- infrastructure investment, e.g. Tennessee Valley Authority investing in electricity and agriculture

GI Bill and Citizenship as Partnership

Dual responsibilities:
Civic Participation (Citizen)
+ Social Provisions (Government)

AT FIRST, HE MAY FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO LIVE WITH YOU THAN WITHOUT YOU

As a former front-line infantryman, returned because of wounds incurred during the Battle of the Bulge, I've read a spate of articles dealing with the problems of readjustment for the returned veteran. I compare them with my own experiences and those of my friends. It makes me wonder how people who haven't gone through what we have can write so glibly about it. These articles carry the easy assurances from experts whose eyes are closed to the variety of human nature and the complexity of modern war. They write as if all men return with similar reactions and face similar problems.

Today the word "soldier" is so inclusive that it covers both sexes, and a soldier's job is divided into thousands of specializations other than fighting. For a very few the war meant forward foxholes, house-to-house fighting or combat missions. For most men it meant handling supplies, checking reports, driving vehicles, drilling recruits, building roads, repairing equipment, working in offices and a host of other necessary functions.

The odds are that your soldier won't come back from the war with horrible memories. He is likely to shrug off inquiries about combat and feel a little guilty and frustrated, as if having been cheated out of a great experience. As with most soldiers, war for him has meant drudgery, not heroics.

If it is not the strain of combat, then what makes readjustment to normal life so difficult? The answer is: Having been a soldier, he finds it hard to be a civilian. Having missed you greatly, he has been forced to find ways of getting along without you. Having loved his fellow soldiers and hated the Army, he is lost when turned free as a civilian. Having looked forward so long and earnestly to civilian life, he finds it dull stuff compared with his dreams.

After the first few whirlwind hours, the actual problems of readjustment begin. It is a little like the letdown that follows the honeymoon, when jobs and finances compete with hugs and kisses. Your man has grown apart from former friends who have not been to war and, among a crowd of civilians, he searches for G. I.'s. It is as though, underneath the new civilian suit, he wears an invisible khaki uniform.

The transition is difficult for him because he feels lonely. For the first time in years, he is not surrounded by hundreds of other men who are very much like himself. He met the difficulties of basic training with comrades. Together with them, he faced the war and sweated out his discharge. Now that he is out, he is alone. And in that terrible loneliness, the past is touched with a softer light. He senses a new, mocking truth in the ironical barracks advice: "Quit your kicking, soldier. When you get out and become a civilian again, you'll never find it as easy as in the Army. You found a home in the Army."

This prophecy, which satirizes every G.I.'s desire for discharge, now assumes a partial truth. He discovers, upon being separated from the service, that he had found a home, that he had belonged to this special world whether he liked the Army or not. In the months that follow he learns, as all of us do, that the way of the returned soldier is hard and lonely.

You must understand that his conception of civilian life has all the glittering novelty of holidays and none of the drab routine of workdays. The postwar world he has imagined is essentially a retreat from the past years of regimentation when, by contrast, civilian life appeared so desirable. To a soldier, it is a special sort of existence, free from regulations and not responsible to an alien will. And because these privileges are denied him, the soldier feels distant and somewhat hostile toward others. His world divides into two groups: "the guy who's in and the guy who's not in." The latter lives off the soldier and prospers through his adversity. Civilians are selfish, grasping and complacent.

Now that he has changed sides, the ingrained values apply to himself. His conscience begins to work as he remembers that others are soldiers while he is free. No matter how much action he may have seen, nor how much he may have sacrificed, he feels guilty. A soldier in time of war always feels that he is doing less than others. If he is in this country, he feels guilty because he is not overseas. Back in rear echelon, he feels guilty because he is not in the front lines. In the front lines, he feels guilty if the sector is quiet. After a fierce engagement, he feels guilty because he has survived, while his friends were killed, or because he was wounded and evacuated while they remained. When he comes home for good, discharged on points or wounds, inside him that guilty feeling is reinforced by a sense of loneliness.

He wants a special sort of comradeship which cannot be found outside the society of fighting men. No matter how much you mean to him, you cannot provide that. He must repress this loneliness and struggle along for a while without this comradeship until the desire for it gradually dies.

"No matter how difficult it will be at first, we'll make out all right," you wives and wives-to-be exclaim. "We love each other, and we'll work it through."

And that's likely to be the truest prophecy. Your love can be the anchor that steadies him during the stormy period of readjustment. But you must meet

When Your Soldier Comes Home

BY LT. FREDERICK ROBIN

it with more than blind love. You must have patience and understanding. Even the intimate character of his love for you has been affected subtly and deeply by the long separation. Your man who found it so hard to live apart from you may find it almost as difficult to live with you again. The soldier, adoring and worshipful when away, may be a perplexed and unwilling Romeo when home again. Somewhere along the line he has become unduly sensitive. You'll notice his tendency to fly off the handle and say things to you that he doesn't mean.

Part of this friction you can rightly attribute to the fact that he is feeling the strain of readjustment and is "taking it out on you." A measure of that you can understand and forgive, but there will be times when he is with you, but his thoughts are a million miles away; he seems to withdraw within himself. You almost suspect that he doesn't want you any more. It's then that you need to have a deeper comprehension of what lies behind this unwelcome turn in your relationship.

Your soldier has been away from you and from the American community for a comparatively long time. His position in an all-male world and his fleeting excursions into the civilian life of other countries have given him little preparation for a return to close association with the distaff side. You, as an American woman, have a higher status and more importance than the women of any other country; and to your G. I., that is not a dry sociological fact. He has spent time in another world where men rule supreme and where women are marginal creatures at best. It will be difficult at first for him to yield to so many feminine influences. He is not accustomed to more than intermittent contact with female society and so, when you suddenly burst upon him, however welcome you will be initially, he will shortly reach a saturation point.

As a result of the long period of absence, he is not prepared to resume the close partnership with you as an equal and to accept you without reservations. He will tend to resent inroads on what little privacy he has managed to safeguard against years of Army effort to make him an interchangeable unit. From force of habit, he will guard his affections and private thoughts closely. His long-checked emotions are not released easily again just by removing the uniform. He has been independent of you for so long that sharing his life with you comes hard at first.

While he has been separated from you, he has thought about you often and missed you deeply. Out of that longing and desire has grown an image which is not you so much as an idealized version of you. Since he could not have you in his everyday world, he has enshrined you on an impossibly high pedestal in his dream world.

You would be flattered but a little scared to know the complete extent of his worship. Your picture is in his wallet and taped inside his helmet. As a doughboy, he gives his rifle your name and fondles it. If a tanker, he paints your name on his turret. Wherever he goes, you go beside him. Your picture comes out frequently, not for his own inspection (he won't forget you), but for the benefit and enlightenment of his buddies. It gets to be a case of, "I'll admire yours if you'll admire mine." But privately he adds, "Mine's really much nicer."

There you have been for these many months—a perfect being in his imagination. But the separation has been long and, even if you hold an undisputed claim to all his affections, what about less ethereal substitutes?

Well, you have them. That is the cold truth. It is the rare soldier who can honestly say that he has never, even in any degree, strayed from the straight and narrow path into the regions you would place "Off Limits" to him. The G. I. slang for it is "liberating a girl," and it means just what you suspect. Remember those pictures of cheering girls who bestowed their affections on the victorious Yanks in Paris and Rome? There were a lot of towns and villages in occupied Europe where the Yanks were just as warmly welcomed by women who hadn't seen their own men for years. To them your soldier looked pretty good. Well, why not? He looks pretty good to you, doesn't he?

Your soldier met a very ardent public which embraced him literally as well as figuratively. He brought not only freedom but also chocolate, cigarettes, food and American gallantry. And they showed their gratitude in diverse ways.

In the soldier's unwritten code of morals, these lapses are perfectly excusable. The hedonistic philosophy, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," is perfectly suited to military life. Were it not for the satisfactions offered by these occasional flings, his life would be more difficult. Through these forbidden adventures, he preserves the remnant of a private life and gains an outlet for repressed urges and new patience to go out again. If his conscience troubles him he thinks, "What the hell, I may as well get some fun out of life. I may be killed soon. And it won't hurt Her anyhow."

Even if there is little possibility of being killed, he acts as though there were. As Kipling said of other soldiers in other wars, "Single men in barricks don't grow into plaster saints." Nor do married men either. In fact, G. I. philosophers believe, "Some married men are the biggest wolves. They know how to howl the loudest."

So, missing you and being very human, your man kicks over the traces (Continued on Page 204)

Copyright © 2015 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

Gendering of Readjustment

Ladies Home Journal, 1945

"At first he may find it more difficult to live with you than without you."

"As a result of the long period of absence, he is not prepared to resume the close partnership with you as an equal or to accept you without reservation. He will tend to resent inroads on what little privacy he has managed to safeguard… His long-checked emotions are not released easily again just by removing the uniform."

University of Chicago prefabricate housing units, 1946 (Chicago Tribune)

Editorial

By Alphonse Heningburg

THE NEGRO VETERAN COMES HOME

THE entire nation takes pride in the spirit and in the accomplishments of our armed forces. Even greater than the miracle of modern war production is the high courage with which our boys meet and defeat the enemy. This courage has not been the peculiar mark of any branch of the armed forces, nor has it been limited to white or to Negro troops. Engineers and infantrymen, Seabees and waist gunners, white boys from Alabama and black boys from Ohio; all these have played their part with honor and with distinction, for all these love America.

The Negro soldier does not love America because he is forced to fight in a segregated army, but rather in spite of this paradox. He views with bitterness the shooting down of black soldiers by civilian police, and he seethes with anger as he watches white soldiers trying to inflame the French against other American soldiers who are not white. This black man knows that he has never been given his full measure of opportunity, yet he has kept his balance, and has often shamed his tormentors by his refusal to use the methods which are consistently employed against him.

The fashion in which the Negro soldier has fought needs no comment. The record speaks for itself. The successive wars in which Negroes have participated have all proved that black Americans are much like white Americans. When we read in *Stars and Stripes* that Negro troops, shortly after the Normandy landings, "dove into the cold water of the Channel to salvage shells from sunken ships," we remember the heroism of all those other black Americans who down through the years have died for their country.

Many Americans are deeply and justifiably disturbed over the possibility that the Negro veteran, embittered by our consistent refusal to give democracy a chance here at home, may initiate the use of violence to register his protest. The editors of OPPORTUNITY do not share in that apprehension. We know that the preachers of hatred are at work every day in many of our communities, but we count strongly upon that sense of balance which characterizes the Negro on the American scene, and the discipline developed by army life. This veteran may be goaded into acts of desperation, but he will not initiate violence.

We deplore the insidious activities of those irresponsible persons who make dire predictions of what the Negro veteran is going to do. "The Negro soldier," say such persons, "is going to blow up the town if he returns to find this same old foolishness going on." This ranting is founded upon neither facts nor experience, and actually represents the type of activity in which these prophets of doom would themselves like to participate. But they will never share in such an enterprise. Like Wimpy, their closest approach to conflict involving themselves may be summed up in the provocative suggestion, "Let's you and him fight."

Our attitude does not mean that we feel that all is well. We believe that there will be strife in America until every family can have a decent home, and until every man can provide, in honesty and in dignity, wholesome living for his wife and his children. We owe to all our soldiers, black and white alike, the chance to forget the hell of war, and the opportunity to live in peace and in security. Many thousands of white soldiers are now eager to help make this opportunity universally available, for they have fought side by side with Negroes, and have learned that the blood of a black man is warm and red like their own.

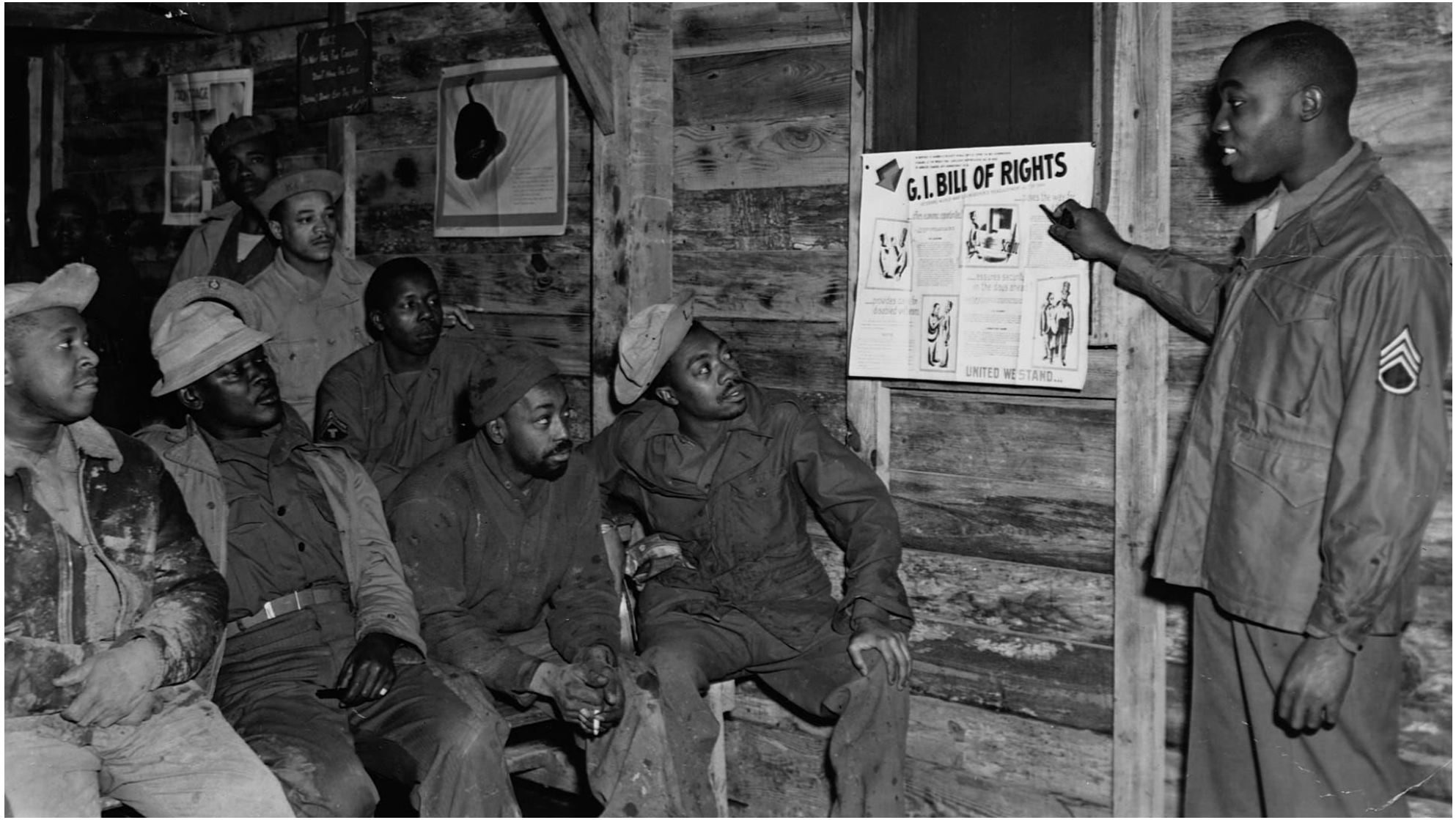
We have no fear that the Negro veteran will precipitate violence, but we would be naive indeed to expect a man who has been baptized by fire to remain calm when intolerable insult is thrust upon him. Ours, then, is not a question of what this veteran will do when he comes back to the land for which he has offered his life. It is rather a challenge to the thinking people of every American community to make it possible for all Americans, black and white alike, to live in peace and in security. Those who are responsible for the enforcement of law, reinforced by those whose attitudes determine whether law is a noble achievement or an ignoble mockery, can largely determine what will happen when we resume the ways of peace. The Negro veteran, like all other veterans, loves his home and the little children who eagerly await his return. Our big job now is to make that return a joyful homecoming, one symbolic of the great spirit in which he crossed the flame-licked beaches of Normandy.

1190102

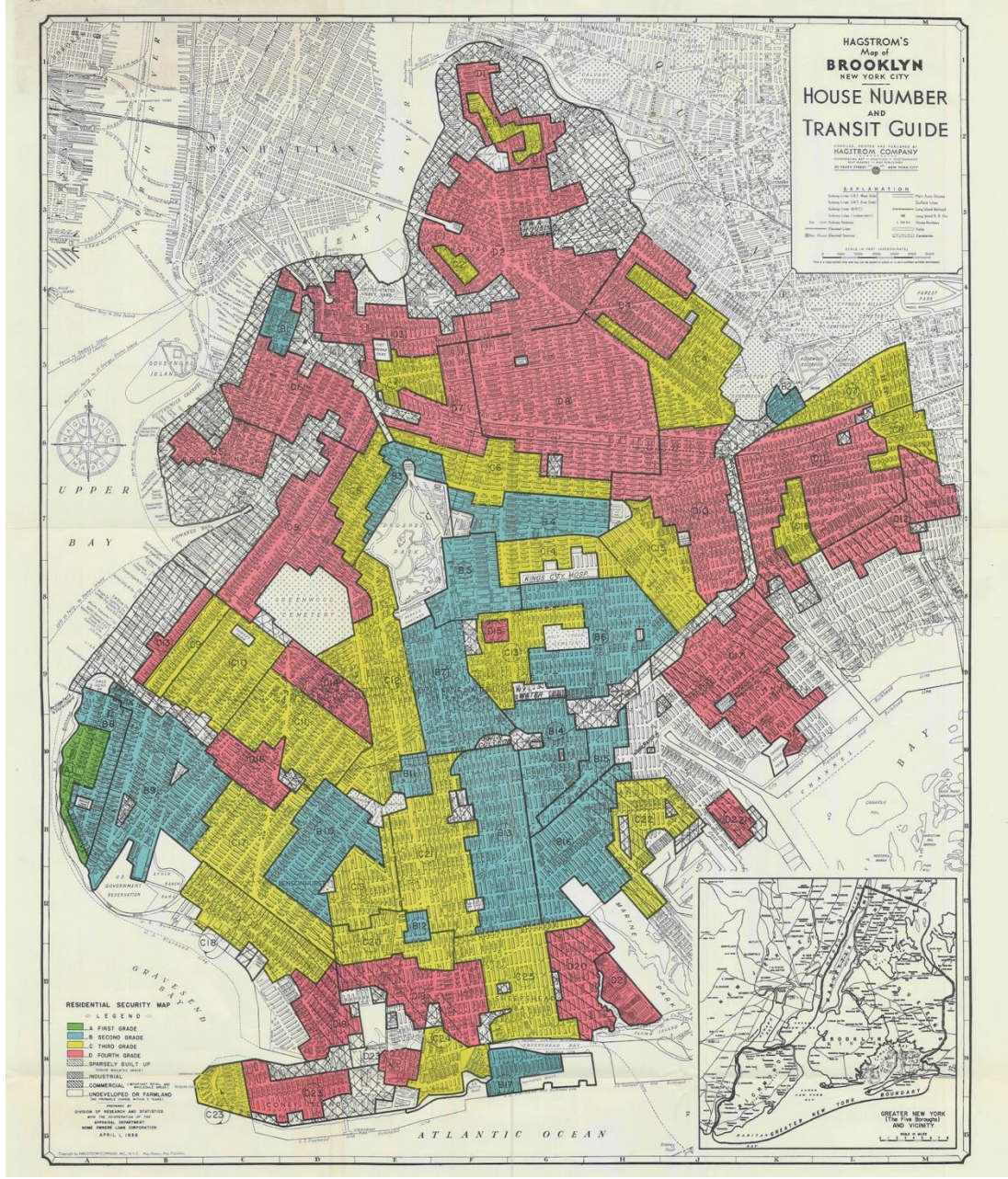
Digitized by Google

"The Negro Veteran Comes Home," *Opportunity,* Winter 1944

"Many Americans are deeply and disturbed over the possibility that the Negro veteran embittered by our consistent refusal give democracy a chance here at home initiate the use of violence to register his protest…. We have no fear that the Negro veteran will precipitate violence but we would be naive indeed to expect a man who has been baptized by fire to remain calm when intolerable insult is thrust upon him. Ours then is not a question of what this veteran will do when he comes back to the land for which he has offered his life. It is rather a challenge to the thinking people of every American community to make it possible for all Americans black and white alike to live in peace and in security."



Sergeant explains the G.I. Bill to fellow soldiers of 15th Air Force Service Command in Italy (Source: Getty Images)
)



1938 Home Owners' Loan Corporation map of Brooklyn, NY

Allen Bernstein, received undesirable discharge in 1944 (Outhistory.org)

Clip from *The Best Years of Our Lives*, dir. William Wyler, 1946

Diary of a Sergeant (1945), with Harold Russell

Paralyzed Veterans of America, founded 1946 (Source: PVA)

Robert F. Jefferson, "'Enabled Courage': Race, Disability, and Black World War II Veterans in Postwar America" (2003)

"Returning home from overseas was tough for all veterans, but it was tougher still for black veterans and disabled white veterans and was perhaps toughest of all for disabled black veterans. The return home not only meant coming to terms with permanent injuries and transcending the stigmatizing gaze of civil society, but also shouldering the overwhelming burden of reentering public life and continuing the fight for equality." (1103)

"Shall I Go Back to School?" "Shall I Take Up Farming?" "Shall I Build a House after the War?" G.I. Roundtable pamphlets, 1944