



The G.I. Bill

The Law That Changed America

A Guide to the Program and its Outcomes

on PBS October 2

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The Law That Changed America

In celebration of this ground-breaking legislation, PBS will air *THE GI BILL: THE LAW THAT CHANGED AMERICA* on October 22, 1997, telling the story of how it came into being, who took advantage of it, and how it forever changed American society. Many historians call the GI Bill the single most important law passed in this century. Yet remarkably, a full-length television documentary about this singular act of Congress has never been made.

We will hear the stories of Harry Belafonte, who grew up poor in Harlem, went to school on the GI Bill, and became one of America's most popular entertainers; Martin Perl, the son of immigrants, who grew up in New York City, and became a scientist and won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1995; Andrew Brimmer, a sharecropper's son who became the first black ever appointed to the Federal Reserve Board. The list goes on to include doctors and engineers; businessmen and real estate tycoons; the men and women who became welders, plumbers, teachers and machinists and formed the economic backbone of the post-war recovery. This film is produced by Karen Thomas, President of Film Odyssey and Thirteen/WNET.

A Bit of History

The roots of the GI Bill lay in the poor treatment given to soldiers in WWI who faced the prospect of unemployment and homelessness. Uncle Sam provided these veterans with very little: \$60, a train ticket home and the promise of a \$500 bonus. As a result, in 1932 thousands of veterans calling themselves "the Bonus Army" marched on Washington, D.C. to demand assistance. Determined to get things moving, the American Legion decided to draft a bill of its own.

The frantic, last-minute search to find the one Congressman whose vote would decide the Bill's fate and the realization of the "American Dream" signed on June 22 by Franklin D. Roosevelt in the form of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 are parts of the story.

Before the war, only one in nine Americans had even graduated from high school. With the Bill, nearly eight million veterans jumped at the chance to finish high school, go to trade school, to college or to graduate school.

Before the war, few Americans owned their homes. The GI Bill guaranteed start-up loans for first-time home-buyers. Over 3,600,000 veterans applied for and received these loans. By 1949, 60% of all Americans owned their own homes.

The GI Bill literally changed the way Americans viewed their economic prospects.

*Please check your local listing for date and time of broadcast.

Here's What PBS Stations and the Community Can Do Together to Help Tell This Great Story

GET THE WORD OUT

Send information to your local veterans administration office and veterans organizations/outreach centers. Ask them to notify their members.

HOST A SCREENING

Partner with local veterans organizations to reach individuals that the GI Bill has affected the most. You can host a screening followed by a panel discussion. Themes for discussion can include: the historical impact and empowerment of the GI Bill; relations between veterans, government and community; or a look into the future of the GI Bill. Your panelists may include employers and educators who have worked with Bill recipients along with government officials and veterans.

TAKE A MOMENT TO REMEMBER

Encourage corporations and educational institutions who have employed and trained veterans to sponsor a Day of Honor. Sharing clips of the program could kick-off the event celebrating the success of the GI Bill and the nation's appreciation of U.S. veterans.

Contact the education departments of museums and libraries. Suggest they produce a historic display of the GI Bill that would include the program as a resource.

CLASSROOM EXCHANGES

Urge history and social studies teachers to record the program and integrate the information into their curriculum. Invite a veteran to talk to the class about how the GI Bill made a difference in his or her life. To make the program more accessible to educators, you may also opt to place it in your ITV schedule.

RECORD RIGHTS

Public Television: Six releases in four years

Off-air re-record rights, one year after each release

NATIONAL RESOURCES

History has proven that thousands of men and women have benefited from the GI Bill. Surprisingly enough, there are veterans today who are not aware of all of the benefits that are still available to them through the United States Government. The following organizations can assist individuals with obtaining information about the GI Bill or any information related to veterans' issues:

AMERICAN LEGION

Washington Office
608 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006-2847
202 861 2700
web address: www.legion.org

The American Legion is a major advocate for America's veterans, a friend of the U.S. military, a sponsor of community-based programs for young people and a spokesman for patriotic values. Its membership consists of about 3 million people with more than 15,000 local posts across the country and in six foreign countries.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

National Headquarters
406 West 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Vern Pall, Assistant Director of Public Affairs
816 968 1170
web address: www.vfw.org

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is one of the largest veterans organizations in the United States. Among the varied services that they offer to the community, they assist any veteran or their dependents in gaining federal or state entitlements. The organization has 2.1 million members with 10,220 local posts.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Central Office (225)
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420
1 800 829 4833
web address: www.va.gov/benefits/education

The Department of Veterans Affairs comprises three organizations that administer veterans programs: the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Veterans Benefits (VBA), and the National Cemetery System (NCS). Each organization has field facilities and a central office component.

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