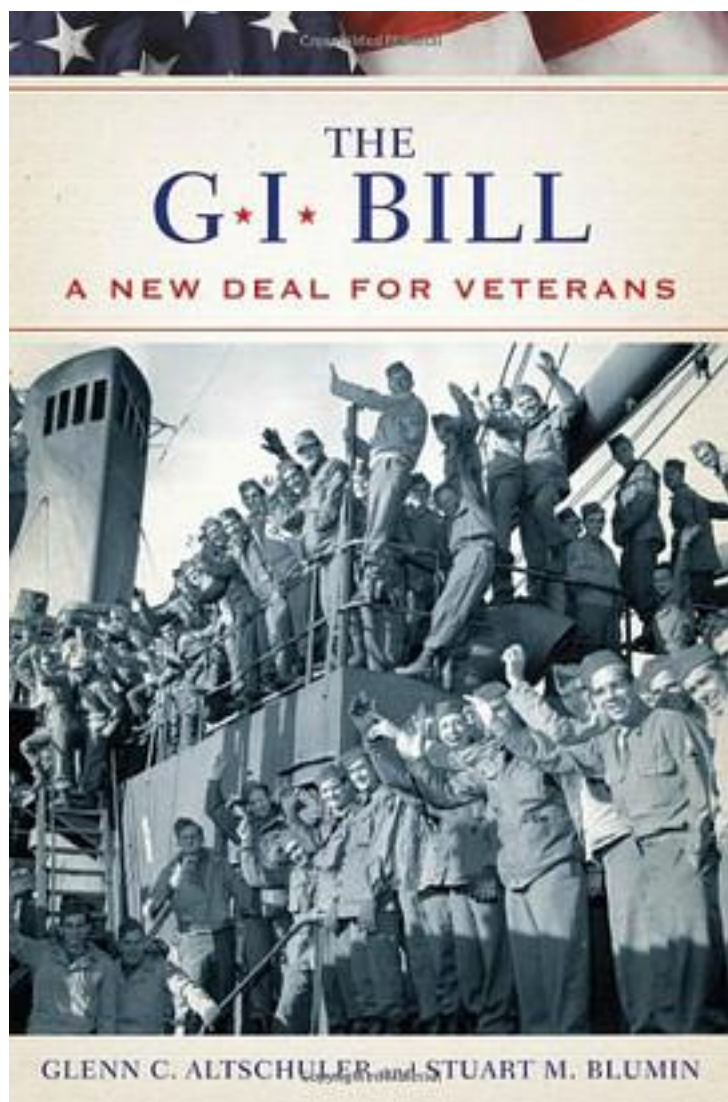


The GI Bill



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On rare occasions in American history, Congress enacts a measure so astute, so far-reaching, so revolutionary, it enters the language as a metaphor. The Marshall Plan comes to mind, as does the Civil Rights Act. But perhaps none resonates in the American imagination like the G.I. Bill. In a brilliant addition to Oxford's acclaimed Pivotal Moments in American History series, historians Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin offer a compelling and often surprising account of the G.I. Bill and its sweeping and decisive impact on American life. Formally known as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, it was far from an obvious, straightforward piece of legislation, but resulted from tense political maneuvering and complex negotiations. As Altschuler and Blumin show, an unlikely coalition emerged to shape and pass the bill, bringing together both New Deal Democrats and conservatives who had vehemently opposed Roosevelt's social-welfare agenda. For the first time in American history returning soldiers were not only supported, but enabled to pursue success--a revolution in America's policy towards its veterans. Once enacted, the G.I. Bill had far-reaching consequences. By providing job training, unemployment compensation, housing loans, and tuition assistance, it allowed millions of Americans to fulfill long-held dreams of social mobility, reshaping the national landscape. The huge influx of veterans and federal money transformed the modern university and the surge in single home ownership vastly expanded America's suburbs. Perhaps most important, as Peter Drucker noted, the G.I. Bill "signaled the shift to the knowledge society." The authors highlight unusual or unexpected features of the law--its color blindness, the frankly sexist thinking behind it, and its consequent influence on race and gender relations. Not least important, Altschuler and Blumin illuminate its role in individual lives whose stories they weave into this thoughtful account. Written with insight and narrative verve by two leading historians, The G.I. Bill makes a major contribution to the scholarship of postwar America.

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