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On Race and Policy History: A Dialogue about the G.I. Bill

Ira Katznelson and Suzanne Mettler

We have independently analyzed the effects of the G.I. Bill's widely-utilized education and training benefits, and reached different conclusions. One of us argues that the implementation of these benefits, especially in the South, helped widen the income and wealth gaps between whites and blacks and further marginalized many African Americans; the other considers them to have been a rare example of a relatively inclusive policy, one that fostered equal citizenship. Because we are both historical institutionalists and we both share interests in matters of social policy, equality, and race, these dissimilar accounts require explanation. This dialogue first considers methodological issues, explaining our decisions about which forms of data to use and to emphasize, and how we made sense of contradictory findings. It next discusses interpretive matters, examining the processes through which we sometimes reached different conclusions even when we confronted the same evidence. Finally, the exchange considers some implications of our findings, probing the lessons they convey both about policy research and practice.

Introduction

Throughout American history, racial inequality has thwarted the democratic ideal of equal citizenship. Even today, decades after the civil rights movement achieved momentous legal and policy reforms, racial gaps persist in most indicators of social and economic well-being and in political participation and representation. As long as the status of American citizens continues to be stratified by race, democratization remains an unfinished project.

This context lends particular significance to scholarly investigations of past public policies that seek to identify those that perpetuated racial inequality and those that fostered racial equality. Such policy histories can yield valuable lessons for the present, both positive and negative.

As scholars of race, politics, and policy in American political development, we have been guided by this goal in our recent books that consider the landmark Servicemen's

Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill of Rights) of 1944, which offered a bountiful package of benefits for veterans returning from World War II. Katznelson has published *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (Norton 2005), devoting a chapter to this subject, and Mettler has written *Soldiers to Citizens: The GI Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford University Press 2005). In assessing the impact of the Bill's education and training provisions on African Americans and racial equality, we come to different conclusions. Katznelson argues that the administration of these benefits widened the gap between whites and blacks in the postwar era, often marginalizing African Americans, especially in the Jim Crow South. While he treats the G.I. Bill as a model for current interventions, he regards its racial heritage as surprisingly doleful. Mettler, by contrast, contends that the benefits proved relatively inclusive across the color line of the postwar era and helped foster equal citizenship; thus she considers them a good deal more positively as a source of historical learning. Some of these differences are stark.

How did we reach such disparate conclusions? What is at stake? We think that it is well worth grappling with these questions. They bear not only on our understanding of the G.I. Bill's impact but, more broadly, on how scholars conduct historical investigations of public policy. They have implications for how researchers proceed when making causal claims about racism or the relationship between public policies and preexisting racial barriers that affect their implementation. At the broadest level, our disagreement raises a more fundamental question. We are both historical institutionalists and students of public

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policy; generally speaking, we agree on plenty. That we have reached such different conclusions directs us to the basic matter all scholars must confront: how we know what we know. For these reasons, it seems worthwhile to engage in a dialogue about the methodological choices and interpretive decisions that led us to such different conclusions.

As a means of structuring this exchange, we have addressed issues that pertain to: (1) methods, (2) interpretation, and (3) implications. We have deliberately focused our discussion on the specific matters over which we disagree, rather than review the impact of the G.I. Bill more generally.

Regarding *methods*, some of the disparity in our conclusions results from decisions about which data, among the diversity of forms we both confronted, warranted the most emphasis. We first address how such choices shaped our analysis of the G.I. Bill's impact. We discuss which kinds of information from the historical record we count as evidence. Also, to the extent that we each confronted contradictory forms of data, we explain how we chose to weigh and assess the historical record.

In other instances, we gave equal weight to the same factual materials, but our *interpretations* of them diverged. Thus, second, we indicate how we discerned and assessed policy success and failure. In the course of this consideration, we discuss whether, or the degree to which, we think it is possible or advisable to distinguish the policy in question from other aspects of the historical social and economic context in which it was created and implemented.

We also weigh some broader *implications* concerning how contemporary policymakers and citizens should understand and respond to the lessons of the G.I. Bill. In the course of this discussion, we consider such topics as the merits and shortcomings of universal versus targeted social provision, remedies for officially-sanctioned harms, and the value of positive and negative policy lessons in today's polity. Lastly, we suggest how our studies might offer directions other scholars might wish to pursue.

Ira Katznelson *African-American Veterans and the G.I. Bill: Arguments and Evidence*

When I set out to write *When Affirmative Action Was White*, I did not intend to include the G.I. Bill. Like most Americans, I considered this immense program for returning soldiers from World War II to be a nearly unqualified success. This theme of accomplishment animates *Soldiers & Citizens*, Suzanne Mettler's fine account of the program's largely positive effects on civic mobilization and democratic participation. Regarding the law's education and training benefits, she rightly observes how they altered prior circumstances in which "advanced education had been restricted primarily to the privileged, especially to white, native-born, elite Protestants."¹ On the basis primarily of utilization rates in such programs, she concluded that "the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits actually demonstrated that government does have the capacity to treat blacks and white equally and to bestow generous resources on both."²

Like Professor Mettler, I am particularly drawn to the G.I. Bill's comprehensive and universalistic qualities. It made all veterans eligible without any further official reference to demography or need, thus differing from more highly targeted social-welfare approaches that often have stigmatizing effects and rest on narrower coalitions of beneficiaries and supporters. Further, the immense scope of the G.I. Bill, notably including help to buy homes, start business ventures, attend college, get vocational training, and secure assistance in job placement, demonstrated that government could manage huge social programs effectively and legitimately, and, in so doing, transform opportunities and reshape the class structure and social geography of American society.

As I conducted my research, my view of the G.I. Bill's regional and racial dimensions altered. The more I learned, the more I came to understand the range and depth of differential treatment the majority of black veterans experienced. I came to grasp why, as early as 1946, the Veterans Editor for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the country's leading black newspapers, could lament "the sorry plight of Negro veterans, and particularly those living in the South," and could describe how "the veterans' program had completely failed veterans of minority races."³ I also began to appreciate the reasons a comprehensive overview in 1947 concluded that it was "as though the G.I. Bill has been earmarked 'For White Veterans Only'."⁴

What led me to an appraisal about black veterans that diverges from that of Mettler despite our shared familiarity with many of the same sources of information, notably including data on black and white participation drawn from a Veterans Administration survey?

Usage and Its Meaning

The third chapter of *Soldiers and Citizens*, “Beyond All Expectations,” announces a wish to adjudicate between what it calls “contradictory” views of the G.I. Bill as either “fostering the development of a black middle class,” or having had black gains thwarted “by such formidable obstacles as persistent segregation at universities across the nation and overcrowding in historically black colleges.”⁵ Claiming that each position has been backed only by anecdotal evidence, Mettler turns to the Veterans Administration for “recently located evidence to assess whether usage of the education and training provisions was a commonplace among black veterans as it was among whites.”⁶

In preparing *When Affirmative Action Was White*, I also consulted this source.⁷ The document on which Mettler heavily relies is a 60-page mimeographed manuscript that the Veterans Administration produced for internal use to assess “benefits and services received by World War II veterans under the major Veterans Administration programs” through August 1950, including hospital care, disability compensation, outpatient dental and medical treatment, readjustment allowances, loan guarantees, and education and training. The data on usage is not an actual count. It was generated by a random sample comprising “approximately one-tenth of one percent of all veterans who had been separated from the Armed Forces to civil life between September 16, 1940 and August 31, 1950.”⁸ The report itself is sensitive to reliability issues. Carried out with considerable professionalism, its unnamed authors note likely ranges of error in a manner that adds confidence to their overall findings while also cautioning us to read small percentage differences with care and some skepticism, especially when sub-group samples are involved.⁹

The report is informative. Putting aside reservations about statistical accuracy and reliability, it presents interesting data about rates of participation in various aspects of the G.I. Bill. Its brief discussion of the law’s education and training provisions identified black usage at 49 percent, as compared to 43 percent for whites. The respective figures for the South (the seventeen states that practiced mandatory racial segregation, plus Washington, DC) were 56 and 50 percent. These figures constitute the key data¹⁰ Mettler deploys to argue that “the G.I. Bill’s benefits reached African American service members.”¹¹ As she notes, the types of usage under these provisions differed quite a lot by race. In the country as a whole, 28 percent of G.I. Bill beneficiaries enrolled in colleges and universities, as compared to 12 percent of black veterans.¹² Thus the higher rates of African American usage reported by the VA mainly were generated by differential black and white rates of enrollment in vocational training schools and on-the-job programs of instruction. This pattern of utilization is the central empirical support for Mettler’s more general argument about black gains under the G.I. Bill, for as she rightly observes, if a bit fleetingly, there was severe dis-

crimination in the application of the law in such other areas as home and business loans and higher education.

Good as it is to have, the information in the VA survey about percentages of involvement hardly offers a definitive evaluation of how black veterans fared in skill training and work-related programs, let alone whether such programs actually boosted significant numbers of African Americans into the middle class. As such, measurements of participation imply little—perhaps nothing—about the programs’ qualities, caliber, or effects. Thus, while we might start with such data, further analysis is required to ask how such inclusion was arranged, whether it was similar across racial lines, and, if not, what were the reasons and consequences.

Rather than treat usage as a sufficient condition of fairness and mobility, my book considers the evidence presented in the VA survey as a useful point of departure. Especially in light of the far from equal treatment black veterans received in the G.I. Bill’s other programs, these numbers invite us to assess more closely, with a dash of skepticism, the meaning of participation in non-collegiate vocational programs. To be sure, systematically estimated participation rates are better than mere anecdote, but they urgently demand careful estimation to gauge both their content and meaning. What was their composition in type and quality? What opportunities did they actually bestow? Did high African American utilization of vocational programs also signal the significant use of the other generous benefits offered by the G.I. Bill?

To the extent these programs are evaluated in Mettler’s writing, they get high marks. Reporting results from a survey of surviving veterans from the black 92nd Infantry Division, we hear only upbeat findings: “Black veterans I interviewed found the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions to be readily available to them, and eligibility rules to be administered fairly. . . . Overall, the usage of the G.I. Bill’s education and training benefits appears to have been as accessible to veterans of the 92nd Infantry Division as it was to white veterans. . . . Others turned to the sub-college programs, using them at rate that surpassed those of white veterans.” Thus, she concludes, “in sharp contrast to their prior encounters with government, black veterans who used the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions experienced fair and generous treatment at the hands of government.”¹³

To support this rosy picture, Mettler reports that 89 percent of African American veterans who participated in sub-college programs thought these had defined a turning point their lives.¹⁴ This estimate does not distinguish their experience by region. Moreover, as the paragraph in which this claim appears contains no citations, I assume it is based on interviews with the 92nd, most of whose members, atypically, actually attended colleges and universities. While recognizing the problems inflicted by southern segregation, she concludes that “nonetheless . . . black

veterans in the South utilized the education and training provisions at higher rates than black or white veterans elsewhere, and the vast majority did so in sub-college programs.”¹⁵ This assertion measures success simply, indeed exclusively, by the rate of African American participation—but participation in what?

We know quite a lot about these programs and their shocking racism. Stimulated by the availability of G.I. Bill largesse, this sector enjoyed astonishing growth. In 1944, when the Bill passed into law, the country had just 35 such private schools. By 1950, there were 10,143. Mettler stresses the positive features of this “instant emergence,” emphasizing opportunity where none had existed before, correctly noting that for many veterans, the growth of these institutions was a boon.¹⁶ Buttressing this claim, her fascinating examination of *non-black* occupational mobility demonstrates that despite the numerous fly-by-night institutions that came into being, many veterans experienced dramatic mobility as a result of this training.¹⁷ But what about African Americans, especially the majority who still lived in the South?

Here the picture is much less pleasant. As a result of the way the law had been drafted, there was no oversight or standard setting by the federal government. With the states either providing public vocational education or regulating the great number of new private vocational schools, African American access in the Jim Crow states was confined to all-black institutions. These, in the public and private sectors, were limited to preparation for “black jobs.” Private sector black institutions were most prone to fraud. Scam artists cynically took the top rate of tuition allowed by the law in exchange for little or even no actual instruction. Not surprisingly, a review of 314 private southern vocational schools for African Americans conducted in 1947 by the Urban League found most to be dreadful, noting that “it is doubtful if many of them meet minimum standards for this kind of training.”¹⁸ Another contemporary report commented that “in the absence of other opportunities, the Negro veteran may be easily exploited.”¹⁹ Likewise, the various on-the-job training programs were starkly limited by southern racist practices, with almost no white businesses willing to take on black trainees. In Georgia, in 1946, black veterans participated in only 6 of the state’s 246 such programs; overall, only 1 in 12 such training venues, according to the Southern Regional Council, was open to blacks. And such training that was offered was very limited.²⁰ The job placement provisions of the G.I. Bill, moreover, operating through locally-staffed and almost exclusively white centers of the United States Employment Service (USES), similarly matched black workers with employers using the standards of Jim Crow.²¹

However impressive, in short, participation rates cannot produce the last word. The VA report itself explained the overall higher take-up rates for education and training

in the South, and within the South by black veterans as the predictable result of high levels of economic deprivation. The poorer the region and the poorer the group, it argued, the more likely it was to be included in various vocational schools and jobs programs.²² Moreover, the higher participation rates in the South cannot “be attributed to the relatively large nonwhite veteran population of that area.” Noting that southerners utilized education and training programs in uncommonly high numbers, it observed that “the explanation can perhaps be found in the lower level in the South of educational attainment and occupational training of veterans—white and nonwhite—at time of entry into the armed forces” and “by the less favorable employment situation after VJ-day in that region compared with other more heavily industrialized areas.” For the same reasons, a high percentage of individuals in training programs also received readjustment allowances, a form of unemployment insurance. Here, too, black participation was higher than white.²³

It is one thing to be induced by deprivation into the areas of the G.I. Bill most intimately linked to being left out of labor markets and quite another to evaluate the resulting participation as necessarily successful or beneficial, let alone an instrument for movement into the middle class. We know, for example, that given their deep poverty blacks took up early New Deal relief in many southern states at higher rates than whites. But that did not mean their place in the economic and social hierarchy of the South was changed; in many respects, it was confirmed.²⁴ A parallel process characterized the vocational provisions of the G.I. Bill.

Mettler’s larger claim about the fairness and effectiveness of the G.I. Bill has to rest on the participation levels the VA reported because, as she acknowledges, black veterans faced steep hurdles in accessing its other provisions equitably. The VA report itself highlights these barriers. By far the largest provisions for transfers of funds and for the creation of wealth via homeownership and business formation were the various loans it guaranteed. Yet, as it turns out, blacks who entered into education and training were less likely than whites to use those other resources. Tellingly, “the rate of participation in Education and Training and Loan Guaranty programs by the same veterans was considerably higher among whites than among non-whites.”²⁵ Mettler explains the relative absence of African Americans from home mortgage, small business, and farm loans as “*more than any other feature* of the G.I. Bill . . . vulnerable to racism because it required African American veterans to pass through a gauntlet of local banks that were often unwilling to make loans to them.”²⁶ Such barriers certainly existed, but more here than in the other features of the law? I doubt this to be the case because *all* the provisions of the G.I. Bill made it necessary for black veterans in the South to “pass through a gauntlet” marked by white supremacy and local discretion.

On the substance of the loan provisions, Mettler and I are in full agreement; indeed we both cite the same report by *Ebony* showing that only 2 of the 3,229 VA guaranteed loans made in 13 Mississippi cities in 1947 went to black veterans.²⁷ Likewise, our treatments of race and southern higher education are quite similar. We both show that the majority of returning black veterans who went home to the South faced a rigidly segregated system marked by poor funding and limited facilities; “African American veterans seeking to use the G.I. Bill for higher education in the South,” she writes, “faced severely restricted options.”²⁸

In this area, as with lending, Mettler and I have no basic differences, only those of emphasis. For in a desire to paint a positive overarching view of the G.I. Bill, she somewhat underplays the depth of discrimination in higher education by focusing on how pre-war educational deprivations led to low post-war utilization. The most data-rich analytical study of these matters by the economists Sarah Turner and John Bound concludes that at the collegiate level “the G.I. Bill exacerbated rather than narrowed the economic and educational differences between blacks and whites.”²⁹ They rightly note that the low number of blacks in college hardly was due simply to a lack of preparation, but to the sheer absence of places as all-white legislatures across the South refused to appropriate funds to expand black institutions at a rate sufficient to the demand, as they far more robustly did for white colleges and universities. Mettler’s own interesting survey of members of the class of 1949 at eleven institutions of higher education about the usage of the G.I. Bill found that “program usage soared highest in the South, accounting for the levels of veteran enrollment at the University of Georgia and at the University of Texas at Austin,” where the percentage of students who were G.I. Bill veterans reached 94 and 91 percent, respectively, well above the average for the eleven institutions of 81 percent. But right at the bottom of the group in terms of usage was Morehouse College, the only black institution in the survey, at 59 percent. She explains this disparity as having been caused by lower educational levels among blacks (and perhaps to lower life expectancy among her African American survey respondents), implicitly downplaying the structural barriers that stood in the way of finding an adequate number of places for qualified blacks at institutions that simply did not have the means to expand as quickly as the demand.³⁰ The vast majority of blacks who went to college under the G.I. Bill did so at historically black institutions like Morehouse where discrimination, a shortage of places, poor facilities, and modest standards were rampant.³¹

Certainly, whenever and wherever black ex-soldiers could take advantage of the G.I. Bill’s provisions, they did, with gusto. Especially north of the Mason-Dixon line, despite the real discrimination they faced in its application, they gained benefits of access to parts of American institutional life—colleges, jobs, homes—they long had been denied.³²

But in the South, the G.I. Bill functioned in a manner deeply consistent with white supremacy and racial segregation across the board; as a result, for the majority of black veterans it was reprehensibly retrograde in ways that, more than any other cause, widened the gap between white and black Americans in the decade after 1945. A comprehensive evaluation, I believe, must fairly conclude just as Linda Faye Williams did in her magisterial consideration of race and social policy, that “while the conventional wisdom is that the G.I. Bill benefited black veterans enormously, in actuality their experience after World War II is in many ways reminiscent of their experience after the Civil War.”³³

Once we acknowledge how blacks fared poorly in southern higher education and in the various loan programs of the G.I. Bill, claims to the contrary about how the legislation helped level the playing field between blacks and whites must rest on how African Americans experienced vocational education and assistance. And that issue returns us to the distinction between aggregate participation and the actual character of the programs they joined.

Decentralized Bias

It makes sense, of course, to evaluate each policy feature of a law as complex as the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act one at a time. Yet if we are to understand its application to African Americans, we have to come to grips with how its remarkably uneven racial and regional qualities were produced by specifications of administrative decentralization placed in the law by design. Written in committees chaired by the arch-racist Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi and the more moderate segregationist Senator Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri, the bill protected Dixie’s racial order by insuring that all its provisions could, in this way, conform to southern racial practices despite its formal universalism and the absence of any specific mention of racial categories.

I am hardly the first to notice this. More than a decade ago, Hilary Herbold observed how “race was contested terrain in the very inception of the G.I. Bill.”³⁴ A few years later, a seminal article by David Onkst chronicled the constitutive racism of the legislation as a matter of intention and implementation.³⁵ An excellent University of Chicago doctoral dissertation by Kathleen Hill Frydl took up these themes with much greater depth and breadth.³⁶ These scholars and I have underscored how the bill was authored by leading supporters of racial segregation and drafted with the keen prodding and assistance of the American Legion, which countenanced segregation, and the Veterans Administration, whose housing and hospitals were racially segregated, to create a program that could be made consistent with southern racial arrangements despite its availability to all veterans. The main means was the way massive federal funding was combined

with state and local control of administration and implementation. Central to all the educational provisions, in particular, was a statement in the legislation, drafted by Congressman Rankin, to the effect that “no Department or Offices of the United States in carrying out the provisions of this part, shall exercise any supervision or control whatsoever over any state educational agency.”³⁷

With regard to the other features of the bill, Mettler concedes that such provisions opened the door to exclusion and discrimination, but in assessing education and training, just such an evaluation is disappointingly absent. It is here, with this silence, that my reading of the available evidence most differs from hers. For Jim Crow did not come to a halt at the threshold of non-collegiate education and training. To the contrary, the values and institutions of white supremacy were constitutive of how these, like the other, provisions were implemented in the South. If we stop before probing the content, organization, and inherent barriers built into these programs when they were administered by southern bureaucrats and politicians committed to white supremacy, we miss the chance to understand the apparent paradox of how high black participation could produce deeply discriminatory results.

We have seen how Mettler set out to adjudicate between the claim that the G.I. Bill moved African Americans into the middle class and the contention that the legislation severely discriminated against this group of veterans. She sees these assertions as “contradictory.” I do not. As I wrote, “it is indisputable that the G.I. Bill offered eligible African Americans more benefits and more opportunities than they possibly could have imagined in the early 1940s” when they were serving in the still-segregated military.³⁸ In this sense, it is correct to include black veterans in the overall appraisal to the effect that “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.”³⁹ Yet this generous assessment has to be sharply qualified because the legislation and its implementation effectively recognized the South’s official and lawful system of white supremacy. For this reason, I concluded my chapter on the G.I. Bill in *When Affirmative Action Was White* by observing that “the way in which the law and its programs were organized and administered, and its ready accommodation to the larger discriminatory context within which it was embedded, produced practices that were more racially distinct and arguably more cruel than any other New Deal-era program. . . . Any celebration of postwar gains for veterans must reckon with these doleful practices and legacies.”⁴⁰

There is much about which Suzanne Mettler and I agree. The G.I. Bill made a profound contribution to modern America. It fashioned a middle class through its impact on home ownership, schooling, job placement, and business formation. It induced greater civic engagement.⁴¹ It exhib-

its a model for how a modern welfare state might be shaped. We also concur that the best available data indicates that African American veterans utilized at least one program of the G.I. Bill at least as much as whites, and possibly at a higher rate. We share the view that “African American veterans were deeply committed to acquiring more education if they had the chance,” that “the G.I. Bill was the means that made it possible for many to act on those inclinations,” and that “they seized the opportunity” where they could.⁴² But these facts are not persuasive as the basis for the larger claim that the legislation served African Americans well overall, or the assertion that they were treated fairly in the area of pre-collegiate education and training. On this, the argument turns.

Suzanne Mettler *Fostering Equal Opportunity and Citizenship*

Americans value the ideals of equal opportunity and political equality.⁴³ This raises the question of whether public policy might have the capacity to both mitigate social inequalities and to expand active citizenship, fostering participation by those whose voices might not otherwise be heard in the political process. As a test case for this possibility, I examined the education and training benefits of the World War II era G.I. Bill. These provisions permitted veterans to pursue, at government expense, higher education or non-college options such as vocational training, on-the-job training, or high school completion. Arguably no other U.S. policy has enjoyed such a hallowed reputation for promoting opportunity and enabling individuals to join the ranks of the middle class. I wondered whether the benefits had truly been as accessible to veterans as has been maintained by popular belief, and whether their inclusivity spanned the racial divide of the postwar era. I also wanted to know whether and how the provisions may have influenced recipients' rates of civic and political involvement, affecting the vibrancy of democracy.

My expectation, as I began the project, was that the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits may have been inclusive among white men across socio-economic classes but that African Americans were likely largely excluded. The G.I. Bill was administered at a time when legalized discrimination persisted in the South; black veterans seeking to use benefits in that region would have done so in the context of segregated institutions. Besides this obvious fact, my assumption about racial bias was based on the patterns I had observed in my previous research on New Deal social and labor policies that were established in the 1930s. Although ostensibly race-neutral, such policies initially left out most African Americans either through occupational exclusions, such as in Social Security, or as a result of the discretion left to the states for determining eligibility, as in the cases of the public assistance programs.⁴⁴ The few existing historical studies that touched on the G.I. Bill's racial legacy further buttressed my expectation.⁴⁵ In short, I anticipated that I would reach the conclusion that Ira Katznelson does in *When Affirmative Action Was White*.

What I found through my research, therefore, came as a surprise. In practice, the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits proved relatively inclusive of both black and white male veterans. A survey of 15,000 veterans conducted by the Veterans' Administration in 1950 revealed that over the first five years following the war, nonwhites utilized the provisions at *higher* rates nationwide than whites. Overall, 49 percent of nonwhites benefited compared to 43 percent of whites, and nonwhite usage rates equaled or surpassed white usage rates in each region of

the country. This was the case even in the South, where 56 percent of nonwhite veterans used the benefits compared to 50 percent of white veterans.⁴⁶

Even more striking, the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits appear to have yielded a powerful impact on male veterans' civic and political participation in the postwar era, fostering a "virtuous circle" of democratization that led to greater racial equality. Among black veterans I surveyed in the 92nd Infantry Division, G.I. Bill beneficiaries grew intensely involved, during the 1950–1964 period, in the civil rights movement: 35 percent engaged in organizing, marching, and protesting to end legalized discrimination, compared to only 8 percent of the non-beneficiaries. Then, from 1965 to 1979, in the wake of the movement's legislative victories, these same individuals became highly active in formal politics: they participated in a wide range of activities—serving on councils or boards of local government, working on campaigns, or contacting elected officials—at rates that were, on average, twice those of the black non-G.I. Bill users. Just as the provisions had incorporated black veterans more fully as citizens, their subsequent involvement, in turn, helped make the polity become yet more inclusive.⁴⁷

My findings challenge Katznelson's view that the G.I. Bill's education and training provisions exacerbated racial discrimination and "significantly widened the country's large racial gap."⁴⁸ This interpretation is not supported by the facts. My research clearly demonstrates that these benefits expanded opportunity in ways that departed from the prevailing discriminatory policies of their age. This constituted a remarkable and important historic development. Further, in ways overlooked by Katznelson, the benefits over time fostered intense civic engagement for social change. This finding underscores the significance of policy feedback effects for mass publics and demonstrates that policies have the potential to enhance citizenship.

It is important to note that my research on other New Deal programs generally supports Katznelson's interpretation that they were racially exclusionary at the outset.⁴⁹ Moreover, my analysis of the G.I. Bill focuses on the education and training benefits; Katznelson's assessment of the Bill's other provisions, namely the low interest mortgages and unemployment benefits, may be correct.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, my findings regarding the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits are at odds with Katznelson's totalizing account of racial discrimination. The racial inclusivity of these parts of the G.I. Bill opens an important and new dimension of research on how public policies may, over time, transform civic involvement, with long-term effects for democracy. Indeed, the racial exclusivity of other policies during the same era further highlights both the empirical significance and the theoretical and normative importance of the G.I. Bill's education and training components.

Methodological Matters

In conducting historical analysis, scholars must make careful assessments about which sources of data on which to rely and which to emphasize; otherwise we risk using data selectively to fit our preconceived notions of the past. This challenge emerges in assessing the central question about the racial inclusivity of the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits: how rates of usage compared between black and white veterans.

Previously, historians have surmised about black veterans' program usage by extrapolating from scattered bits of evidence drawn from individual institutions or localities, typically at particular moments in time. Both Katznelson and I had access to the far more authoritative source that I mentioned above: the national survey of 15,000 veterans conducted by the Veterans' Administration (VA) in 1950. This study revealed that nonwhites' rate of using the education and training benefits surpassed that of whites nationwide, such that by 1950 approximately 640,920 of the nation's 1,308,000 black veterans had used the benefits.⁵¹ As I located other systematic and large-sample size studies, I found that they corroborated these patterns of usage. For example, a study of veterans in the Special Training Units, groups comprised of poorly educated soldiers who had been offered literacy training while in the army, showed that southern blacks utilized the G.I. Bill's education and training programs at the highest rate, twice that of northern whites.⁵²

Yet, whereas I understand the VA study to be an authoritative source on the matter of program usage by race, Katznelson does not. He mentions its results only briefly and then proceeds to characterize my reading of it—that it indicates that the provisions were quite racially inclusive—as “not so much wrong as misleading.”⁵³ In a footnote, Katznelson defends his choice to deemphasize the results of the VA study by saying:

This document's data has to be read with extreme caution. That the sample size is small is not itself a problem; the margin of error is within a range of just 1 percent. But the document does not report on the demographic characteristics of the approximately fifteen thousand veterans who did respond, including the racial distribution of respondents. Further, given the upward tilt of most respondents, there is good reason to believe that the African Americans who were surveyed were disproportionately northern, better off, and more likely to have used the G.I. Bill.⁵⁴

Katznelson's skeptical reaction about the representativeness of the VA study is surprising. No data are perfect and researchers are almost always forced to make trade-offs by using datasets that are good but have shortcomings; grappling with such limitations is the cost of being able to conduct empirical analysis, an enterprise that can yield results of considerable value. Most scholars, moreover, would consider a survey of 15,000 to constitute an unusually *large* sample and would assign to it a relatively high degree of credibility given that it was gathered according

to random sampling techniques and produced such a low margin of error.⁵⁵ The particular concerns Katznelson raises are not convincing. For example, his caution that black respondents may have been “disproportionately northern” does not make sense given that the survey results are presented on a regional basis.⁵⁶

After casting doubt on the credibility of these usage data, Katznelson proceeds to highlight instead the anecdotal evidence that historians have had to rely on previously. He offers examples of low usage rates by black veterans in specific institutions and high numbers of black veterans turned away by historically black colleges due to overcrowding.⁵⁷ I concur that these instances demonstrate obstacles encountered by black veterans as they sought to use their benefits in the context of Jim Crow segregation.⁵⁸ But Katznelson's implication that such examples undercut the evidence of the program's broad inclusivity is problematic. Unlike the VA study with its national scope, the more limited evidence on which he draws is often derived only from individual cities, states, colleges, or programs. Whereas the VA study offered usage rates across a five-year period, Katznelson's examples are based on narrower moments in time—from one month or one year. The sources from which they come, furthermore, offer no information about data collection processes or the representativeness of those studied.⁵⁹ Yet unlike Katznelson's cautious assessment of the VA study, he raises no methodological concerns about these data.

Neither does Katznelson consider how to reconcile these particularistic data with the seemingly contradictory results of the VA study. I expect that the more narrowly derived data may offer valid indications of circumstances in particular places and moments in time, but that longer-term national or regional patterns are likely captured more accurately by the VA study. Katznelson draws primarily on sources of data from the first years after the war, especially 1945 and 1946, whereas the VA study measures usage up through August 1950.⁶⁰ The disjuncture between the data may indicate that early on black southern veterans encountered greater obstacles to program usage than whites but that many prevailed in their search and eventually found spots in institutions that accommodated them.⁶¹ Already by 1946, the rates of black enrollment at institutions in the North and West had more than doubled, and black veterans continued to migrate in large numbers to those regions where they could use the G.I. Bill away from the constraints of Jim Crow.⁶² By not grappling with such issues, Katznelson appears to emphasize less representative data that support his larger argument and to deemphasize more systematic data that contradict it.

In making these criticisms, by no means do I intend to disparage qualitative approaches; historical analysis of policy outcomes benefits from the combined and appropriate use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, qualitative analysis enabled me to probe individ-

uals' experiences of G.I. Bill usage and non-usage; I did this through in-depth, open-ended interviews with veterans across the nation. The examination of aggregate trends requires, however, that we use the most reliable quantitative data available. Scholars seeking to do this are often confronted by a dearth of broadly-derived, reputable data and a plethora of anecdotal data of uncertain quality. When more reliable sources do exist, it is essential that we take them seriously and consider how we might reasonably reconcile other forms of data with them.

Certainly obstacles abound in this kind of research; I found, for instance, that no previous surveys enabled me to examine how G.I. Bill usage influenced civic engagement. Therefore, I conducted surveys of World War II veterans, gathering data from over 1000 respondents. While I reached a nonblack male sample that permitted systematic quantitative analysis, the lower life expectancy of black males meant that I could survey only a small, more limited sample of black veterans and thus I use those data in a more cautious and qualitative fashion.⁶³ In sum, in analyzing the effects of past policies, scholars must often grapple with unsatisfactory data; the challenge is to make careful and reasoned decisions about how best to proceed and to move forward with a realistic understanding of the limitations we face.

Interpretive Matters

The assessment of the impact of the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits on racial inequality presents a key interpretive challenge: discerning whether the provisions themselves influenced outcomes, and if so, how. Both Katznelson and I give ample attention to the unequal circumstances that black veterans confronted in the course of program usage and afterward. He interprets many of these inequalities as if they emanated from the G.I. Bill itself. By contrast, I find them to be traceable to exogenous factors, namely the legacy of legalized segregation in the South and the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in labor markets nationwide. These laws and practices, which pre-dated the G.I. Bill by many decades, influenced the form of black veterans' program usage and curtailed its immediate socio-economic impact on their lives.⁶⁴

Without question, Jim Crow segregation structured and restricted southern black veterans' usage of the education and training benefits. Whereas colleges across the nation experienced overcrowding during the "G.I. Bulge" and program quality was questionable in many of the nearly 5,600 new trade schools that sprang up to meet veterans' demands, southern blacks faced worse conditions than whites in the separate institutions they had to attend.⁶⁵ Katznelson treats the circumstances black veterans confronted as if they were inseparable from the G.I. Bill itself, concluding, "The performance of the G.I. Bill mocked

the promise of fair treatment."⁶⁶ I understand them to be the outcome of state-level laws in the South, policies that were avoided by black veterans who used the provisions elsewhere in the nation.

We also diverge in how we interpret the different ways that black and white veterans used the education and training provisions. While the G.I. Bill is widely associated, in popular lore, with college attendance, in fact the vast majority of World War II era beneficiaries—regardless of race—used the provisions for noncollege programs. Yet whereas 28 percent of white G.I. Bill users pursued higher education, only 12 percent of black veterans did so; black beneficiaries, conversely, pursued vocational training and high school completion at higher rates than whites.⁶⁷ Katznelson treats this difference as evidence of the law's poor record among African Americans.⁶⁸ This overlooks the fact that among the Army troops during World War II, only 17 percent of black soldiers had already graduated from high school compared to 41 percent of white soldiers.⁶⁹ Because high school completion is generally regarded as a prerequisite to college attendance, it is not surprising that black veterans were less likely than whites to use their G.I. Bill benefits to attend college.⁷⁰ This disparity emanated not from the G.I. Bill but rather from pre-existing racial inequality borne of decades of legalized segregation. The G.I. Bill's education and training provisions, being available to all soldiers who had served 90 days or more, did not purport to close the racial gap that such practices had created, but they did enable all veterans to have access to more advanced study than would have been the case otherwise.

We also disagree about how to measure the G.I. Bill's impact on black and white veterans. Both of us respect a recent study by economists Sarah Turner and John Bound that shows that outside of the South, G.I. Bill usage raised college attendance rates among both blacks and whites, whereas in the South it did so for whites but not blacks.⁷¹ Katznelson uses this study to argue that the G.I. Bill "significantly widened the country's large racial gap."⁷² I contend, however, that Bound and Turner focus only on educational attainment, which is measured according to years of *formal* education. By this measure, those who went on to college gained, whereas the high proportion of black veterans who used the noncollege training programs showed no discernable improvement, no matter how extensive their training or how valuable the skills it offered. The G.I. Bill offered veterans a variety of means of acquiring a human capital investment regardless of their prior level of education; the fact that more white veterans were positioned to use the form that elevated their formal educational attainment emanated, once again, from pre-existing inequalities, not from the law itself.

We both agree that black veterans, even after achieving college degrees under the G.I. Bill, received earnings that were much less than those of whites with the same level of

education.⁷³ In the postwar era, the wage gap between individuals with one to three years of college education versus those with a high school diploma was \$1300 among whites but only \$300 among blacks.⁷⁴ But whereas Katznelson does not explore the dynamics leading to this outcome, my analysis suggests that the widespread persistence of racial discrimination in labor markets facilitated such results. Black veterans whom I interviewed explained that when they sought jobs after graduating from college on the G.I. Bill, they often received the same low-status, low-paying positions they would have obtained beforehand. Although the data I collected from black veterans about their jobs in 1960 compared to their fathers' jobs in the 1920s does show evidence of improvement in occupational status among G.I. Bill beneficiaries, nonetheless they secured employment in a narrower range of jobs than white beneficiaries.⁷⁵ In this era prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the persistence of racial occupational segregation curtailed the impact of the G.I. Bill on black veterans' socio-economic advancement.

The problem with conflating the G.I. Bill with the effects of legalized segregation and labor market discrimination is that it prevents systematic policy analysis: it becomes impossible to disentangle factors that hindered the inclusion of African Americans as first-class citizens from those that actually promoted it. Distinguishing between these factors analytically, I find that the education and training provisions yielded positive effects that transcended the postwar racial divide, fostering equal opportunity and participatory citizenship. Black veterans acquired far more education and training than they would have in the Bill's absence and they gained both greater capacity and inclination for civic engagement. At the same time, the legacy and persistence of racial bias presented formidable obstacles that attenuated the Bill's social and economic impact among black veterans. Those same factors also prompted black G.I. Bill users, with their enhanced civic capacity, to channel their subsequent civic and political involvement toward fundamental social and political change.⁷⁶

All told, the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits represented the *most* racially inclusive policy of the era rather than, as Katznelson claims, the *least* so.⁷⁷ Certainly the provisions could have been more powerful still if Jim Crow policies had already been eradicated. Yet even in the segregated context in which they were administered, state and local officials lacked much capacity to divert benefits away from African Americans. The provisions' federally-defined eligibility criteria made them far more inclusive than either the New Deal federal grant-in-aid public assistance programs, wherein southern states could determine eligibility in ways that excluded African Americans, or the G.I. Bill's mortgage provisions, for which black veterans had to deal with local banks—which used red-lining procedures nationwide—to gain approval for loans. The generous monthly subsistence allowances that the G.I. Bill

granted to all veterans while they underwent training or education varied neither by race, region, nor type of training; rates were determined only by veterans' marital status and by whether they had children, and those rates applied uniformly, nationwide.⁷⁸ Such hallmarks of inclusivity and generosity made the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits remarkable not only for their own time, but from a contemporary standpoint as well.

Broader Implications

The racial legacy of the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits is relevant today both because of its implications for current policy choices and because of its analytical bearing on how we make sense of the past. On the basis of what Katznelson understands to be the effects of the G.I. Bill and various New Deal policies, he promotes a new package of social policies targeted to individuals who can demonstrate a family legacy of exclusion from the benefits of such policies. His plan would "extend affirmative action in order to end it within one generation."⁷⁹ With respect to the education and training benefits of the G.I. Bill, I contend that this plan would not yield the effect that he intends.

First, Katznelson's approach would likely not reach as many African American families as he expects given that black veterans—even when they encountered more hurdles in the process—eventually gained access to the education and training benefits at comparable rates to white veterans. His plan would probably be more effective at channeling benefits to white descendants of the Merchant Marine and Women's Air Force Service Pilots, two groups that were entirely excluded from G.I. Bill coverage.⁸⁰

Second, the targeted policy Katznelson promotes would be at odds with the G.I. Bill's universalistic format, an approach with considerably greater capacity to foster incorporation of citizens, social solidarity, and political participation. While he suggests that in his plan "the major instruments would be the same as those the federal government utilized in the G.I. Bill," the basis of eligibility would be derived far more narrowly, based on family history.⁸¹ The education and training provisions granted benefits on an inclusive basis to individuals who had fulfilled their civic duty, recognizing and affirming their commitment to the polity. Thus, whereas segregation in the Armed Forces and in southern educational facilities "projected humiliation" on black veterans, as Katznelson rightly observes,⁸² the education and training benefits actually bestowed dignity and civic status.

This basis of deservingness matters critically for the civic impact of policy receipt. Policies that are targeted to narrowly defined groups fail to incorporate beneficiaries as citizens with equal standing to others in the polity and may reinforce their second-class status. The experiences that citizens gain from such policies can undermine their

sense of political efficacy and may thus result in lower rates of political participation. By contrast, policies that incorporate broad classes of citizens and stress the mutual obligations between them can boost recipients' political efficacy and rate of political involvement.⁸³

Among black veterans, these interpretive effects of the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits combined with the policy's resource effects to facilitate active involvement in the civil rights movement. For many, the provisions were the one positive experience of government they had acquired up to that point, situated amidst numerous stigmatizing experiences. In the words of Celeste Torian, whose husband used the benefits after his service in the 92nd Infantry Division, following the war "the only good thing was the G.I. Bill."⁸⁴ The benefits provided evidence that the federal government had the capacity to fashion public policy that encompassed African Americans. In addition, by permitting black veterans to gain education and training, the provisions gave them access to the skills, resources, and networks that are widely recognized to help boost civic capacity.⁸⁵

Thereafter, black G.I. Bill users became particularly active in the civil rights movement. After attending Northwestern University on the G.I. Bill, Henry Hervey, a Tuskegee Airman, explained that "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 into the Army: It was either a janitor or a mailroom clerk." But he continued, "By that time you learn that you can fight city hall, and you have to fight, and there are ways you can bring pressure to make changes." Together he and countless others mobilized effectively to transform the policies and practices that had so long excluded them from full inclusion in the polity. Among famous black G.I. Bill users were Medgar Evers, the NAACP leader who was assassinated in 1963; Hosea Williams, who led the march for voting rights from Selma to Montgomery until he was beaten unconscious by state troopers in a scene that appeared on national television and which prompted President Lyndon B. Johnson to send the Voting Rights Act to Congress; and Aaron Henry, who led the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Party and the Council of Federated Organizations, as well as numerous boycotts and sit-ins.⁸⁶ The United States became a more fully democratized nation due to the courageous activism of such individuals.

Today, the ideals of equal opportunity and citizenship are still stymied—now by the legacy of past racial discrimination combined with the rise, in recent decades, of economic inequality. Yet we live in an era when government solutions are suspect. I expect that if my undergraduates read Katznelson's book, they would be easily convinced of the argument that government has, in the past, played a powerful contributing role to deeply entrenched inequalities. But as a result, many would balk when, in the final

pages of his book, Katznelson turns to public policy to set things right; given government's poor track record, they would favor market-based solutions instead. Yet, as market-based inequality has risen in the United States in recent decades and U.S. government has failed to mitigate its effects, the successes of the rights revolution have been curtailed as a result.⁸⁷ Today's inequalities, though not as rigidly forged along racial lines as in the past, still find African Americans profoundly disadvantaged.

The G.I. Bill, through its education and training provisions, offers an example of how government *can* succeed in making the United States more fully democratic. It did so by extending social opportunity across racial lines and then by fostering active political citizenship among beneficiaries such that they mobilized to make the polity yet more inclusive and egalitarian. Only if we can understand how American public policy once did build "a bridge over the racial divide," broadening the scope of democracy, can we begin to imagine how it could do so once again.⁸⁸

On a theoretical level, my approach to analyzing the impact of public policies for mass publics requires that we probe their development as they unfold historically, *across time*.⁸⁹ In focusing only on the moments of policy creation and early implementation, Katznelson imposes a static analysis on phenomena that tend to be inherently dynamic. As implementation proceeds, policies may generate unanticipated results. These may emerge as effects of program administration or of the policy's interaction with concurrent social, economic, and political changes.⁹⁰ As well, a policy may transform individual lives, yielding ripple effects across time. In this manner, the G.I. Bill's first-order effects—the access it provided to education and training—generated second-order effects of heightened political involvement. By combining the analytical tools of policy feedback theory with historical analysis we can unravel effects of public policy that have long been overlooked by standard policy analysis and which are critical to understanding how policies influence democratic citizenship.

Ira Katznelson Reply to Suzanne Mettler

Suzanne Mettler's spirited defense of the G.I. Bill with regard to its impact on racial inequality, even in the Jim Crow South, has grown more emphatic and less qualified. The law, she insists, "did 'build a bridge over the racial divide,' broadening the scope of democracy," and yielding "positive effects that transcended the postwar racial divide, fostering equal opportunity and participatory citizenship." She characterizes the legislation's educational and training opportunities, on which she places special emphasis, as "the *most* racially inclusive policy of the era," that offered returning black soldiers "dignity and civic status" by enabling "all veterans to have access to more advanced study than would have been the case otherwise" (emphasis original). Further, she argues, the law's "federally-defined eligibility criteria" for education and training produced circumstances in which "state and local officials lacked much capacity to divert benefits away from African Americans." The G.I. Bill, she contends, is a "test case" for how "public policy might have the capacity to both mitigate social inequalities and to expand active citizenship."

Under the heading of "methodological matters," she dismisses as "scattered bits of evidence drawn from individual institutions or localities, typically at particular moments of time" the rich array of case material and statistical data on which not only I but other students of the veterans programs have relied to reach conclusions that differ substantially from hers, preferring instead what she calls "the far more authoritative" study the Veterans Administration sponsored that found the rate of black usage of G.I. Bill programs to be somewhat higher for blacks than whites.

This indeed is a useful source of data, but only when its findings are probed to get underneath the aggregate numbers to understand their composition. Because I pointed out in a footnote in *When Affirmative Action Was White* that the finding of significant black participation in that document was not a measure of actual usage but was based on research whose detailed methods we cannot access, she suggests that I dismissed this material. I did not. Based on that survey and the Ginzberg and Bray study on which she also relies, my book observed that "when they could, blacks seized the chance. . . There is ample evidence that black soldiers expected the G.I. Bill to provide training and upward mobility, and indeed they applied for as many benefits as they could. . . Hundreds of thousands, in fact, gained resources in many cases that were simply unavailable to non-G.I.s."⁹¹

Mettler's methodological strictures about surveys and case research aside, the important choice is not whether to employ both types, but how to draw on the full array of existing material. Precisely because I also began with the best available quantitative data, I next did what any such evidence demands. I turned to more micro-level studies to comprehend how the summative usage numbers were com-

posed, and which mechanisms and patterns of distribution underpinned black usage. The results are pretty startling. African Americans were significantly under-represented in the home mortgage, business and farm loan, and college-level programs of the G.I. bill (even, for the latter, when we control for educational level and eligibility), and over-represented in its pre-collegiate schooling and training opportunities. Thus our dispute turns empirically on the meaning of high black participation in this aspect of education and training.

Perhaps it is worth underscoring that this is a contained difference. Mettler and I are in broad accord about how the G.I. Bill sharply discriminated against African American soldiers in all its other provisions. Though rhetorically downplayed in her writing, she, too, notes the deeply different ways blacks and whites were treated when they applied for loans or were placed in jobs; she, too, recognizes the vastly different kinds of college experiences open to blacks and whites who qualified under the G.I. bill (though she fails sufficiently to call attention to how southern states provided places for virtually all eligible whites without doing the same for African Americans who wished to attend the region's historically black colleges). These features of the law were crucial to upward mobility and the creation of a modern middle class. Some blacks, especially many in the North and West, gained such status as a result of their access to these programs. But even there, and far more so in the South, the region to which most black soldiers returned, the gap between whites and blacks widened not just because of Jim Crow, but because the veterans legislation was tailored to permit racism to flourish.

Mettler's singularly positive evaluation thus turns entirely on the character and meaning of vocational schooling and training at a pre-college level. But nowhere does she challenge, or produce facts to challenge, not just my findings but those of a good many other scholars who have established that these opportunities were terribly flawed. The rapid creation, very limited training, job ceilings, and other limitations of the segregated southern programs made the great majority barely adequate, if that. Many were fraudulent shells, mere excuses to collect the tuition for which all veterans, regardless of race, were entitled. Mettler's own essay also avers, if with remarkable understatement, that, in just these courses so central to her argument, "program quality was questionable."

After making too much of my cautionary words about the VA survey, Mettler's methodological discussion contrasts its "seemingly contradictory results" with "particularistic data," as if the aggregate figures somehow infirm the cumulative local experiences of repeated discrimination and poor, often non-existent, instruction in just those areas of the G.I. Bill black soldiers used the most. Clearly, there is no empirical or logical contradiction between high usage rates by African Americans in the one area of the

law to which they were given most access and the doleful character of this opportunity. Rather, these quantitative and qualitative characteristics combining high usage with poor quality, taken together, reveal why it is misleading to focus exclusively on utilization rates. It is, moreover, something of a canard to note, as Mettler does in dismissing some mid-decade material, that black participation rose through the 1940s. Of course it did. The program's deeply flawed vocational schools, the one set of programs that sought to recruit black veterans more energetically than whites, were the fastest growing segment of the law during the second half of that decade.

Mettler is right to put most of the blame on the terrible situation of southern blacks on racist laws and practices that predated the G.I. Bill. She is right, too, to insist that the legislation did offer some resources that, in this setting, would have not been available otherwise. My book said exactly that. But she is quite wrong to treat the law in the South as somehow thwarting Jim Crow. It was deliberately crafted in southern-led congressional committees to make universal benefits consistent with racist practices. The design worked. In the political circumstances of the time, perhaps this outcome was inevitable; but it should not be let pass in our policy histories.

Mettler, in short, puts too much emphasis on summary statistics without sufficiently probing their content and meaning. But she offers a second body of evidence based on revealing interviews she conducted a half-century later with surviving members of the 92nd Infantry Division, a unit of black enlisted men and white officers based in Italy that saw combat in Europe after the invasion of Normandy. These conversations, revealing a large debt to the G.I. Bill and confirming high rates of usage, corroborate my own assertion that "to this day, many black veterans rightly credit these opportunities as turning points in their lives. There can be no doubt that . . . the G.I. Bill made a very big difference for these individuals."⁹² But judging by their rates of college attendance and the location of these institutions outside the South, it is clear that the members of the 92nd were not typical black veterans. The richly appreciative quotations Mettler reports, as she says about other such materials, are interesting and revealing as anecdote, but hardly representative.

But what of the important claim, central to larger virtuous circle, policy-feedback argument of *Soldiers to Citizens*, that successful black experiences with the G.I. Bill produced a greater level of participation in the later civil rights movement? Mettler demonstrates a clear and compelling correlation. Yet in the absence of greater specification of the particular mechanisms linking the two experiences, it seems at least as plausible to believe that a combination of wartime experience in the Jim Crow army, with all the normative contradictions the fight against fascism and dictatorship entailed for black soldiers, together with the mix of opportunity and rebuff proffered by the

G.I. Bill, generated a combination of skill and anger that helped southern blacks find a voice and the means to overcome formidable problems of collective action under conditions of white resistance.

Mettler worries that the full story of racism and the G.I. Bill somehow will lead her students to distrust governmental solutions. I think it is more likely they will learn to probe the difference between putative and real universalism. I would also hope they would consider how today's public policies might best address the legacy of harms that I have tried to chronicle, and how to combine broadly universal social goals with more targeted policy innovations that take this history into account. In trying to answer a question put by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965—why did the racial gap grow in the postwar years despite widespread prosperity?—*When Affirmative Action Was White* argued that public policies, notably including the G.I. Bill, played a key part. By attending to this history, in turn, it is more, rather than less, likely that we can craft a mix of policies that might make sense today. In so doing, we should take care not to simply dismiss all targeted remedies in the name of a commitment to universalism, as if past policy experience somehow had transcended race.

Like Mettler, I think the G.I. Bill offers a test case. Its racial record is a sad example of how even the best, most energetic, most egalitarian, most comprehensive, most normatively inclusive, and most liberal social policies in the New Deal-Fair Deal era were deeply injured by their encounter with Jim Crow through the willful and politically skillful defense of racism conducted by well-positioned Democratic Party members of Congress who represented the segregated South. For sure, African Americans were not excluded by the formal terms of the legislation. But its terms of administration and its pathways for participation widened the racial gap and reinforced an American tragedy.

Suzanne Mettler Reply to Ira Katznelson

In his essay Ira Katznelson once again attempts to use my analysis of the G.I. Bill as a foil against which to make the case that racism pervaded every aspect of the law. I suspect that his implication that I present a “rosy picture” of black veterans’ experiences of the education and training provisions would strike many readers of *Soldiers to Citizens* as surprising. The book contains extensive description of the many ways in which the prevalence of legalized racism affected black veterans’ form of G.I. Bill usage, their experience of its implementation, and its socio-economic effects on their lives.

By portraying my analysis as if I minimize such circumstances, Katznelson obscures how critical differences in the ways we each conducted our analysis led us to our divergent conclusions. Here, I will comment on some crucial areas of disagreement that have become more evident in this exchange.

In his essay Katznelson again deemphasizes the value of the most systematically collected and comprehensive data available for assessing the G.I. Bill’s record on race. He prefaces his consideration of the results of the 1950 Veterans’ Administration national survey of a random sample of 15,000 veterans with the qualification that it requires “putting aside reservations about statistical accuracy and reliability.” “The data on usage is not an actual count,” he warns us. Most scholars would be surprised by the demanding expectation that data should involve an “actual count” of the population in question—in this case, by Katznelson’s own figure, 12 million veterans.⁹³ Political science research routinely uses data that are drawn from a random sample of the population in question, such as the National Election Studies, the General Social Survey, or the Citizen Participation Study of 1990. In fact, by contemporary standards, the VA study’s sample of 15,000 qualifies it as a remarkably large survey for assessing a population. Ironically, however, despite Katznelson’s expressed skepticism about data based on less than an “actual count” of all veterans, he then proceeds freely to make an argument that is, once again, based on scattered anecdotes that he presents in the absence of any consideration of data collection techniques or representativeness.⁹⁴

To the extent that Katznelson acknowledges the usage data that show that more blacks than whites used the education and training provisions, particularly for non-collegiate programs, he tells readers that these numbers must be used only as a “point of departure” that “invite us to assess more closely, with a dash of skepticism, the meaning of participation” in such programs. Katznelson’s major argument about the provisions’ racism, therefore, rests on his contention that the programs that black veterans in the South attended were characterized by poor quality—such that the training they received was inferior to that gained by white veterans. Besides the fact that the causes

of such inequality lay in the Jim Crow segregation laws of the southern states that long pre-dated the G.I. Bill’s creation, this claim is problematic because it rests on an absence of any systematic evidence.⁹⁵ Contrary to Katznelson’s assertion that “we know quite a lot about these programs,” unfortunately we do not. What we do know is that all vocational training programs nationwide came under scrutiny by Congress and the media in the late 1940s. Of the 8,000 programs approved by the government to offer such training, fully 5,600 opened their doors after the enactment of the G.I. Bill; not surprisingly, public officials worried that many of these were “fake schools” or “fly-by-night” operations of questionable quality.⁹⁶ While Katznelson’s claim of inferior quality in programs serving southern black veterans is most likely correct, he makes it in the absence of any comparative evidence indicating quality in programs that white southerners or veterans elsewhere attended.

Katznelson attributes to me one argument that is contrary to what my work suggests, that the G.I. Bill served as “an instrument for movement into the middle class” for black veterans. I found, rather, that even when black veterans attained the *same* level of training or education as white veterans, subsequently they experienced neither the same boosts in income nor in occupational status.⁹⁷ Where we actually differ with respect to this matter is how we interpret it; where Katznelson blames the G.I. Bill for such socio-economic disparities, I argue that they emanated from entrenched labor market practices that perpetuated job discrimination against African Americans. After the war black veterans experienced considerable discrimination and disadvantage, but the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions were not the source of such inequities.

Katznelson devotes attention to policymakers’ intentions in creating the G.I. Bill, pointing out that segregationists purposefully designed the policy such that federal controls could not restrict state educational agencies and therefore would not disrupt Jim Crow. Such politics were standard practice in that era: an analogous story can be told for each of the other New Deal social provisions for which implementation occurred on the state level. Notwithstanding the importance of this policy history, in the case of the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions policymakers’ intentions alone do not provide us with an accurate indicator of policy outcomes. Given features of the policy’s design, state officials lacked the discretion to restrict black veterans’ eligibility for either program usage or attainment of subsistence allowances. Furthermore, the bill’s outcome that arguably became the most significant for black veterans—its impact on their civic engagement and political participation—emerged as an *unintended* consequence, one that helped to undermine the system of white supremacy and to expand democracy.

This last point reveals the most significant difference in our approaches: the socio-economic outcomes of policy

are the endpoint of Katznelson's analysis whereas I probe beyond them to uncover civic and political consequences in individual lives. In a footnote, Katznelson takes issue with my argument, suggesting that to the extent black G.I. Bill users became more involved in the civil rights movement that it must have been because of their experience of the "unrealized promise" of the legislation and their "frustration of exclusion" from it. This does not make sense because, as we have seen, African Americans were not excluded from the policy. What set black G.I. Bill users apart from other black veterans was not an extra experience of exclusion but a single and pivotal experience of inclusion, one that gave them skills, networks, and in some cases resources—all factors that have been recognized as critical determinants of participation.⁹⁸

Today, many decades after the achievements of the civil rights movement, our society is still plagued by inequality. To some extent, such inequality is the enduring legacy of the age of Jim Crow, red-lining, and other once-legal practices. The more proximate cause, however, is the enormous rise in economic inequality in the last three decades, trends that have transformed our social structure and, tragically, reinforced in many ways the racial stratification of the past. To combat inequality today, therefore, it is not sufficient to learn only about past policies that mandated or reinforced racial stratification. Rather, we need also to sift through our history in search of policies that successfully fostered inclusivity across both race and class. The G.I. Bill's education and training provisions constitute such an example, one that demonstrates how public policy can enable citizens themselves to claim political power and to reinvigorate democracy.

Notes

- 1 Mettler 2005a, 11.
- 2 Mettler 2005, 140.
- 3 Gibson 1946, 1.
- 4 Bolte and Harris 1947, 20.
- 5 Mettler 2005a, 54.
- 6 Mettler 2005a, 55. A more extended discussion basically based on the same evidentiary base and making similar arguments can be found in Mettler 2005b.
- 7 We both have Michael Brown to thank for finding and providing us with a copy of this manuscript. He utilizes this material in Brown 1999.
- 8 U.S. Veterans Administration 1950, 1.
- 9 U.S. Veterans Administration 1950, 1–4.
- 10 The other source of information is Mettler's own survey of the black 92nd Infantry Division, the only such unit that participated in combat after joining the European theatre in 1944, after the invasion of Normandy. As Mettler notes in Appendix D, this, at best, a suggestive survey, replete with all kinds of difficulties, not least those of mortality and distance from the events. "Thus, I interpret the data on black veterans in a more cautious manner than the data on nonblack veterans, and consider it indicative only of the sample here and not as representative of the original universe of black veterans' experiences." The 104 respondents had unusual characteristics, including their very high rate of pre-war schooling; of this group, fully 78 percent had completed high school before joining the Army (Mettler 2005a, 181).
- 11 Mettler 2005a: 54.
- 12 Mettler 2005a: 56.
- 13 Mettler 2005b: 38–39.
- 14 Mettler 2005a: 80.
- 15 Mettler 2005a, 80.
- 16 Mettler 2005a, 85.
- 17 Mettler 2005a, 95–96.
- 18 Cited in Onkst 1998, 531.
- 19 Bolte and Harris 1947, 15.
- 20 Bolte and Harris 1947, 14–15; Onkst 1998, 526.
- 21 Katznelson 2005, 138.
- 22 Veterans Administration 1950, 23.
- 23 Veterans Administration 1950, 24, 28.
- 24 Sterner 1943; Myrdal 1944; Brown 1999.
- 25 U.S. Veterans Administration 1950: 29.
- 26 Mettler 2005a, 102; emphasis added.
- 27 Katznelson 2005, 140; Mettler 2005a, 104.
- 28 Mettler 2005a, 76.
- 29 Turner and Bound 2002, 25.
- 30 Mettler 2005a, 67–68.
- 31 Mettler has criticized the study by Turner and Bound for overlooking sub-college programs where black participation was high, saying that "it fails to illuminate the fundamental question of whether the G.I. Bill's benefits proved accessible to black veterans" (Mettler 2005a, 209, n.52). Though important, this information, I have been at pains to show, is *not* the 'main issue,' which, rather, concerns the character, qualities, and results of access.
- 32 Cohen 2003, 171.
- 33 Williams 2003, 112.
- 34 Herbold 1994–95, 104.
- 35 Onkst 1998.
- 36 Frydl 2000.
- 37 Cited in Frydl 2000, 185.
- 38 Katznelson 2005, 140.
- 39 Mettler 2005a, 11.
- 40 Katznelson 2005, 140–141.
- 41 The main theme of *Soldiers & Citizens* concerns how the universalistic and comprehensive features of the G.I. Bill induced civic engagement. I am sympathetic to this argument, which builds on earlier work by Robert Putnam and Theda Skocpol, among other students of social capital (Putnam 2000; Skocpol 2003).

But in the case of African Americans and the civil rights movement, I think the book's overly positive reading illuminates only part of the story. For it was not the bounty of the G.I. Bill that sparked black mobilization and the means with which to overcome quite deep barriers to collective action. Rather, the mix of real assets some achieved and the bitterly unrealized promise the implemented legislation offered to many more that created a brew of means, wherewithal, deprivation, and resentment that, together, by combining the taste of freedom with the frustration of exclusion, proved sufficiently powerful to motivate action that transformed the South, and, with this, the United States as a whole.

- 42 Mettler 2005a, 56.
- 43 Schlozman, Page, Verba, and Fiorina 2005, 23–25.
- 44 Lieberman 1998; Mettler 1998.
- 45 Onkst 1998; Herbold 1994–95; Brodtkin 1998. For a more recent example, see Cohen 2003.
- 46 U.S. Congress, Committee on Veterans' Affairs 1956a, 72; U.S. Veterans Administration 1950, 27. While this latter document is not dated, it reports results of a survey conducted in 1950.
- 47 Analysis of World War II Veterans Survey, reported in Mettler 2005a, Chap. 8 and Appendix Table F.8.2, p. 190.
- 48 Katznelson 2005, 141.
- 49 Mettler 1998.
- 50 I discuss the low interest mortgages in Mettler 2005a, pp. 100–104.
- 51 Although a brief mention of the summary statistics of this report appears in a widely available government document, scholars have not mentioned them previously. That source is U.S. Congress, Committee on Veterans' Affairs 1956a, 72. Katznelson and I are both indebted to Michael Dawson, who in the course of archival research located the full report which offers these statistics in greater detail. See U.S. Veterans' Affairs 1950, 27, and generally, 12–13, 20–28. Also see Brown 1999, 189–90 and Table II.
- 52 Ginzberg and Bray 1953, 126. Also see U.S. Veterans' Administration 1980, which reports findings of a 1979 study of veterans of World War II and the Korean War, which also shows (p. 96) that black veterans were more likely than whites to use some of the non-college training programs. Interestingly, also, Turner and Bound 2002 offer a more detailed break-down of these same data which reveals (although they do not discuss it in their analysis) that black veterans from most birth years used the education and training benefits at equal or higher rates overall than white veterans. See Turner and Bound 2002, p. 32.
- 53 Katznelson 2005, 121.
- 54 Katznelson 2005, 121, note 38.
- 55 U.S. Veterans' Administration 1950, 1–4.
- 56 Also, given the composition of the World War II military and typical labels for racial classification at that time, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of those referred to as “nonwhite” were African Americans. And while surveys may generate an “upward tilt” among respondents, it is not clear why that bias would be more pronounced among nonwhites than the whites. Mettler 2005b, 29–30; also see Katznelson 2005, p. 128.
- 57 Several examples are mentioned in Katznelson 2005, 130–33, 135–37.
- 58 Mettler 2005a, 74–76, 80, 82.
- 59 For example, Katznelson cites Olson 1974, 74, who suggests that 20,000 veterans were turned away at black colleges, but in examining the source Olson cites for this point, Atkins 1948, I am unable to find that figure or to determine how Olson arrived at it. Another source that Katznelson mentions, Bolte and Harris 1947, says that 55 percent of veteran applicants had to be turned away, but they offer no source for this figure.
- 60 For example, see Bolte and Harris 1947, in which the bibliography includes sources mostly from 1945 and 1946; also see sources mentioned in Katznelson 2005, p. 130, note 68 and p. 132, notes 79, 80.
- 61 It is possible, of course, that under fully accessible conditions black usage of the education and training programs would have surpassed white usage at an even greater rate.
- 62 Bolte and Harris 1947, 4–5; Stouffer et al. 1949; Thompson 1946, 579; Turner and Bound 2002, 15, note 11. Besides the possibility that many black veterans moved to the north to use their benefits, it is also possible that they waited to commence their studies. Among veterans generally, use of the college benefits did not peak until 1948, and use of the vocational benefits did not peak until 1950 and then declined slowly. U.S. President's Commission on Veterans' Pensions 1956, 288. Veterans who had not previously expected to acquire more education commenced their studies under the G.I. Bill more slowly than those for whom it had already been part of long-term personal plans.
- 63 The black veterans' sample size is 104 individuals. Mettler 2005a, p. 181, and for greater detail see Mettler 2005b, 50–52.
- 64 My interpretation of the G.I. Bill's impact among African Americans is largely in accord with that of Linda Faye Williams in *The Constraint of Race*, pp. 111–114. She explains that “the nature, role, and impact of the GI Bill is complex.” She points out that “some of its provisions were directly helpful to blacks” (112) but also shows how “the context of widespread racial inequality and white advantage”

- hindered its ability to foster racial equality (113). I also largely agree with her broader argument that the U.S. welfare state has tended to promote rather than to ameliorate racial stratification. Significantly, because she considered the evidence about the G.I. Bill's effects to be limited, she refrained from clearly identifying it as an example of a policy that solidified white privilege (114). For reasons that will be apparent in this essay, I do take issue, however, with her suggestion that it "sharply increased the distance between the middle and working classes . . . and blacks and white" (114).
- 65 U.S. Veterans' Administration 1945, 137–38; U.S. President's Commission on Veterans' Pensions 1956, 290; U.S. Committee on Veterans' Affairs 1956b, 55–61; Mettler 2005a, ch. 5, *passim*, for comparison between programs for black veterans and other institutions.
 - 66 Katznelson 2005, 141.
 - 67 Katznelson 2005, 134; Mettler 2005a, 55–57.
 - 68 His argument follows the same logic as that of Turner and Bound 2002, but they rely upon the same limited sources that I have already criticized, such as those mentioned above in notes 17 and 18.
 - 69 Fass 1989, 141.
 - 70 In the survey data I collected from nonblack veterans, I found that those with less prior education were less likely to use the G.I. Bill to attend college: this pattern was by no means unique to black veterans. In fact, the black veterans' survey data I collected hints that black veterans who were poised to pursue college education may have taken advantage of the G.I. Bill even more readily than nonblacks, refusing to let obstacles like greater age and less prior education stand in their way. Mettler 2005a, 56; Mettler 2005b, Appendix C.
 - 71 Turner and Bound 2002; Katznelson 2005, 134; Mettler 2005b, 34–35.
 - 72 Katznelson 2005, 141.
 - 73 Katznelson 2005, 134; Mettler 2005b.
 - 74 Miller 1966, 145–46.
 - 75 Mettler 2005b, 42–44.
 - 76 Mettler 2005b, 44–49.
 - 77 Katznelson 2005, 129, 140–41.
 - 78 This is significant both because for the federal government, the cost of the subsistence allowances far outweighed the cost of tuition for the education and training provisions, and because veterans themselves found the payments to be extremely helpful.
 - 79 Katznelson 2005, 172.
 - 80 Mettler 2005a, 145–46.
 - 81 Katznelson 2005, 171–72.
 - 82 Katznelson 2005, 172.
 - 83 Wilson 1987, Chap 7; Skocpol 1991; Soss 1999; Schneider and Ingram 1993.
 - 84 Mettler 2005b, 48.
 - 85 Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Mettler 2005a, ch. 8.
 - 86 Mettler 2005a, 136–37, 142.
 - 87 Hacker, Mettler, and Pinderhughes 2005, 159–63, 173–79.
 - 88 I have borrowed this expression from Wilson 1999.
 - 89 Pierson 2004.
 - 90 Hacker 2005; Streeck and Thelen 2005.
 - 91 Katznelson 2005, 121, 119.
 - 92 Katznelson 2005, 119.
 - 93 The U.S. Census Bureau aims for an actual population count, but social scientists in the Bureau have argued in recent years that this approach is actually *less* likely than a random sampling approach to produce an accurate count due to the fact that it typically misses large portions of segments of the population—such as racial minorities—that are harder to count.
 - 94 Once again, Katznelson uses evidence from the early years of the Bill's implementation, 1946 and 1947. He remarks that the results of the VA survey that I emphasize come from a "60 page mimeographed manuscript." In fact most of these results also appear in a published, widely available government document—U.S. Congress, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 1956, p. 72 and Appendix C, pp. 299–353—and the mimeographed report simply offers more disaggregated data. The results also cohere with data from other studies that I mention in note 10 of my longer essay in this exchange.
 - 95 As he does in his book, Katznelson offers a few data points, each from a particular state or a particular year soon after the war's end. He cites secondary sources for each of these. In an attempt to ascertain the primary sources from which such data was derived or at least some information about such data, I have examined each of these secondary sources and I have also consulted the additional secondary sources that authors of such pieces identify as evidence. In none of these instances have the sources led to information that is any more definitive.
 - 96 Mettler 2005a, 42, 77–84. Interestingly, most veterans who used the program still considered the G.I. Bill a "turning point" in their lives, though at lower rates than higher education beneficiaries, and among non-blacks, at lower rates in the South than in the North—likely indicating lower quality in the significantly larger number of programs that opened instantly in that region. Given the small size of my sample of black veterans, unfortunately it does not make sense to report results by region. Mettler 2005a, 87–88.
 - 97 Mettler 2005b, 42–44.
 - 98 Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995.

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