

Veterans Educational Benefits: post-9/11 GI Bill's Impact on African Americans Men

Cameron Peters

Occidental College

Urban and Environmental Policy
UEP 410/411
Professor Cha
Professor Shamasunder
May 4, 2018

Introduction

Within the cultural narrative of the United States of America, there has grown a perception among African Americans that the Black community has been separated from the mainstream culture and denied a chance at the American dream. Though African Americans have been an integral part of the American narrative since the establishment of the colonies, the Black community has always been treated as second-class citizens. Historically, mainstream American authority utilized institutional racial discrimination to enslave its Black population, free them at the great cost of life in the Civil War, and then subjected them to second-class citizenry. Regional policy, from the Jim Crow era that swept most of the post-civil war south (Parker 2009); to national policies such as “separate but equal” which allowed for the divestment of entire Black communities are examples of this institutional oppression (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483, 1954; Parker 2009). Furthermore, African Americans have had to endure unequal treatment from the establishment of ghettos in all major American city through the practice of redlining (Shapiro, Meschede, and Osoro 2013); to the inequitable and disproportionate criminal sentencing and targeted incarceration of the American criminal justice system (Alexander 2012). Analysis of these policies reveals that historically, when it comes to managing its Black population, American policy results in the expulsion of African Americans from mainstream American culture. African Americans are geographically segregated to certain neighborhoods, ostracized from traditional avenues of economic mobility and investment, essentially disabling the community's ability to accumulate wealth, and physically incarcerating its young male population. These policies have left devastated communities of color in their wake, contributing to the generational cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement.

Within the midst of this detrimental social engineering, the federal government has enacted progressive legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and in some cases reinterpreted the legality of racially discriminatory legislation, such as integration and the dissolution of “Separate but Equal” (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483, 1954). One specific piece of legislation, the GI Bill of Rights, has been celebrated as one of the most successful federal investment in the human capital of the US. Although the GI Bill was not specifically designed to alleviate the inequalities that racial discrimination produce, it is a subsidy that African Americans can utilize to their advantage in a government and social system that denies them traditional avenues of socioeconomic advancement.

In this report I outline the impact that the post-9/11 GI Bill has on African American males. Utilizing a mixed methodology, I compare census data from 2005 and 2015 to determine the impact of Veteran status on African American males. Furthermore I interview six African American Veterans to get their perspective on the my research question which is: Does the post-9/11 GI Bill improve the lives of African American Veterans over their non-Veteran counterparts? I define improved lives as higher college attainment and improved economic factors including income levels, unemployment rate, and poverty levels. This research report determines that African American males perceive military service as a viable path to achieve economic mobility. I found that being a Veteran has an positive improvement on the income levels of Veterans over their non-Veteran counterparts. Additionally the post-9/11 GI Bill facilitates the college attainment for all the Veterans interviewed in this report. Though there were some limitations to my ability to compare college attainment levels based on post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits, this report shows a positive impact of the policy on Black men.

Recommendations to improve the post-9/11 GI Bill include changes to the amount of educational benefits, the schedule of payments and the burden of bureaucracy.

Background

Background of African American reality

Though African Americans have greatly contributed to the cultural and economic prosperity of America, the opportunities available for an individual living in a low-income community is little to none. Traditionally, the generational effects of divestment in Black communities and schools has not only limited the path of education as a viable route to advancement along the socioeconomic ladder, but has created animosity and scorn around the attainment of higher education among the young Black populous. National American policies such as “separate but equal” have been exposed as having detrimental effects on non-white minority communities (Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483, 1954). Creating an entire second system of conventions ensures that one will take precedence over the other, creating government institutions that are less funded and of lower quality. These government institutions are essential to economic mobility and advancement up the socioeconomic ladder. This secondary system led to a tradition of underfunded, understaffed, substandard education system that was the only one available to these low income communities. This long history of neglect has contributed to the perception among African Americans that education, though the primary means of successful advancement up the socioeconomic ladder for white Americans, is not a axiom for the Black community. The sometimes terrible quality of the entire education system that Blacks have access to yields little to no results; even if an individual excels in their

particular setting, the school district they come from can be of such low quality that their education is rendered moot.

For the African American community, there is a perception that there are very few options to escape a low socioeconomic status. This problem seems to be magnified for Black men in particular. Black men are more likely to be sent to prison and less likely to attain a college degree than any other sub population in the US (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In 2015, the Department of Defense published its bi-annual information regarding the health and welfare of our armed forces. Hidden within its demographic analysis was an interesting statistic. For 2015, the percentage of active duty personnel who identified as African American stood at 17%, while Blacks only made up approximately 13% of the general population and Black males 6%. This discrepancy indicates that among African Americans, a term of military service may be perceived as an opportunity to alleviate the strife that exists around the infraction of being born Black in America. Setting aside the moral conflicts and psychological dissonance of a term of service to a neglectful government that has essentially concluded that their existence is a crime, can African American men utilize the path of a term of military service and the subsequent GI Bill benefits as a means to escape the entrapment of low socioeconomic communities?

African American Military Service

Despite historic cultural and institutionalized racial discrimination, African Americans have been an integral part of American history and have fought in and contributed to every American war (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017). These African Americans were apart of the armed forces in segregated units from the Civil War through the Korean War; performing in both

support and combat capacities (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017). However, in 1948 President Truman ordered the desegregation of the military establishment. Although the Navy and Air Force accomplished integration by 1950, the Army, with the vast majority of African American servicemen, did not achieve desegregation until after the Korean conflict (Coffey 1998). Vietnam, then, marked the first major combat deployment of an integrated military and the first time since the turn of the century that African American participation was actually encouraged (Coffey 1998). Although African Americans have participated in all American wars, they have sometimes faced almost as bitter a hostility from their fellow Americans as from the enemy (Butler 1999). However, since the 1970s, the U.S. military has made a serious effort at racial integration, and while much remains to be done, the military has achieved a degree of success in this area that surpasses most civilian institutions (Butler 1999; Coffey 1998).

Historically, from 1940 to 1973, African Americans were less likely to join the military than Whites when compared to their representation in the general populous (Butler 1999; Coffey 1998). In 1962, President Kennedy reactivated the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces, which explored ways to draw qualified African Americans into military service (Coffey 1998). In 1964 African Americans represented approximately 13 percent of the U.S. population but less than 9 percent of the nation's men in arms. The committee found uneven promotion, token integration, restricted opportunities in the National Guard and Reserves, and discrimination on military bases and their surrounding communities as causes for low African American enlistment (Coffey 1998). Before the government could react to the committee's report, the explosion of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia changed the problem (Coffey 1998). An expanded military, a discriminatory draft, and other government programs brought not only

increased African American participation but also, accusations of new forms of discrimination (Coffey 1998).

U.S. involvement in Vietnam unfolded against the domestic backdrop of the civil rights movement. From the outset, the use, or alleged misuse, of African American troops brought charges of racism (Coffey 1998). Civil rights leaders including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who criticized the Vietnam conflict as, "a White man's war, a Black man's fight" (Coffey 1998; Sutherland 2003). King maintained that Black youths represented a disproportionate share of early draftees and that African Americans faced a much greater chance of seeing combat (Coffey 1998).

On March 27, 1969, President Nixon announced the appointment of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017). The Commission studied a broad range of possibilities for increasing the supply of volunteers for service, including increased pay, benefits, recruitment incentives, and other practicable measures to make military careers more attractive to young men (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017). In 1973, as the Vietnam War ended, the military began the era of the All-Volunteer Force. The move to an All-Volunteer Force helped to remove systemic racial barriers across the armed forces. According to the VA, African American enlistment rose sharply after the dismantling of systemic racial discrimination. At its peak in the Vietnam Era, Black representation of active duty personnel was 22%, which dwindled to 20% by the Gulf War in 1990 to 17% in 2015 (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017). In the face of institutionalized discrimination, African Americans bore more than their fair share in terms of duty to country. However, their contribution was not rewarded with the same admiration as their white brothers in arms.

Incentive to serve such as the GI Bill of Rights had different effects on Black Veterans than was intended for White Veterans.

GI Bill of Rights: Then and Now

Often lauded as a triumph of federal economic legislation, the GI Bill was a successful investment in America's returning war-time generation that encouraged long-term economic growth (Stanley 2003). On June 22, 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Public Law 78-346, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, to provide sweeping new benefits to World War II Veterans. The law has since been commonly known as the "GI (Government Issue) Bill." The GI Bill provided honorably discharged Veterans with access to a college education, job training and placement, loans to purchase homes, new home construction, or farms, farming equipment, and more (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944). Though the GI Bill provided many benefits, this report will focus on the educational benefits, which allowed returning Veterans to attain higher education by covering the cost of the Veterans college tuition. In 1944, the GI Bill provided a monthly stipend of \$50 to single Veterans and up to \$75 for Veterans with families and it covered the cost of tuition and associated fees up to \$500 (Hewitt 2016). By 1956, approximately 2.2 million Veterans utilized their educational benefits to attend colleges and universities with another 5.6 million using the bill to enroll in training or vocational programs (Zhang 2017). Of the total 15.3 millions World War II Veterans, 7.8 million, approximately 51%, eventually used their GI Bill Benefits (Stanley 2003). Within the first decade of the bills implementation, the country gained more than 400,000 engineers, 200,000 teachers, 90,000 scientists, 60,000 doctors and 22,000 dentists (Katznelson 2006).

There have been a few iterations of the GI Bill over time, effectively changing the output of the educational benefits and the requirements of who was eligible. In 1981 the mandate to update the GI Bill was lead by a Mississippi Congressmen named Gillespie Montgomery. The Montgomery GI Bill (1984-2008) was the law of the land before the current post-9/11 iteration (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2017). Veterans who wanted access to the Montgomery GI Bill had to contribute \$100 a month over 12 months to be entered into the program (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2017). The program also had an added \$600 buy up scheme that allotted an addition \$5,400 in compensation to any soldier that contributed (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2017). In addition to the \$1200 admission fee, Veterans on the Montgomery GI Bill were required to use their prepaid benefits within ten years of their original service date (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2017). These additional requirements and regulations resulted in a drop in service member enrollment of the educational benefits of the GI Bill. However, this dip in attendance was reversed when in 2008, legislators passed the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, better known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Zhang 2017). When compared to the Montgomery GI Bill, the new post-9/11 GI Bill was a much more generous educational package. The new Bill covers the full cost of a state college tuition while providing a housing allowance for vets and \$1000 a year stipend for books and associated costs (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2017). Additionally the new bill increased the time limit of usability from ten years from last date of service to 15 years; removing all time restrictions for any Veteran with a term of service after Jan. 1, 2013 (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2017).

The new post-9/11 GI Bill is more inline with the original Servicemen's Readjustment Act in that it is a direct investment in America's human capital with an aim at improving and

encouraging long-term economic growth. The Department of Veterans Affairs reports that from September 11, 2001 to fiscal year 2016, of the 2.7 million Veterans who have returned from active duty, approximately 790,000 or 29% of Veterans have utilized their educational benefits under the post-9/11 GI Bill (Zhang 2017). Though a recent study by Zhang (2017) found that the new GI Bill had an initial 3% increase on overall college enrollment. This boost could be attributed to the implementation of the new program, which allowed for Veterans caught in the transition to trade their Montgomery benefits for the new post-9/11 benefits (Zhang 2017). Additionally Zhang found that the post-9/11 GI Bill had a, “consistent and positive impact” on college enrollment across different age ranges from 20 to 60 (Zhang 2017). There has been much research and analysis of the effect of the historic GI Bills educational benefits on the life course and socioeconomic mobility of Veterans during past wartime eras. My research will contribute to this rich body of knowledge by analyzing the impact of the new post-9/11 GI Bill on the socioeconomic status of African American male Veterans.

Literature Review

Military Service as a Lasting Effect

A review of the literature reveals that military service has a profound and lasting effect on the lives of service members during their military career and after their separation from the armed forces. Much of this research focuses on how military service affects the marital outcomes of service members (Heerwig and Conley 2013), military service and its connection to criminal careers (MacLean and Elder 2007, Lunden 1952), lifelong health outcomes of those who have served (Bedard and Deschênes 2006, Haibach et al. 2017), and socioeconomic advancement (Wilmoth and London 2013). Additionally, many of these effects have been viewed through the

lense of the five major principles of the life course theory (Elder 1998). Additionally as a result of shifting social perception and support of military personnel coupled with waning public support of different wars, the research has found that the effects of military service on the life course of individuals varies depending on different historical periods (MacLean 2005, Teachman 2005). The synthesis of this body of knowledge indicates that the US military is a social institution that can restructure an individual's occupational, educational, health, family, and socioeconomic status establishing lasting life-course outcomes and trajectories (Wilmoth and London 2013). Though the effects of military service is well documented on many aspects of an individual's life, for the purpose of this project I will be focusing on military services and its effect on socioeconomic advancement for historically disadvantaged groups, specifically through the use of the GI bill to obtain higher education.

Life-Course Theory

To understand the ways in which the military has a lasting impression on the ability of individuals to change their socioeconomic status, I examine the situation through the lens of the Life-Course Theory. Life-course theory is the idea that human beings are constantly changing over the course of their lives because of different factors like social structures and culture that can result in drastic changes to their overall life trajectories and outcomes (Elder 1998). The Life course itself is defined as "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" (Giele and Elder 1998). Life course research has expanded into a multidisciplinary study of the human condition over time that includes psychological, sociological, economic and demographic data. According to Glen H. Elder Jr., "historical forces shape the social trajectories of family, education, and work, and they in turn influence behavior

and particular lines of development” (Elder 1998). The social trajectories of an individual's family, educational background, and choice of career or employment status are the most influential factors that will determine an individual's life course outcomes (Elder 1998, Mayer 2009). Though there are many life course perspectives that can be observed, there is consensus in the literature that the following five perspectives are the most influential in determining the effects of military service on an individual (Wilmoth and London 2013).

1. Human Agency. The many outcomes of an individual's life can be determined by a vast array of outside influences, however it would be remiss to neglect the influence of human choice. It is up to an individual in many cases throughout their lives to choose between the available options that present themselves. To varying degrees, individuals can choose where they live, where they work, where they will go to schools, and who will be a part of their social support structure. In the era of the all volunteer army, an individual must choose to join the military and endure the hardships that it entails while also reaping the benefits of service.
2. Location in time and space. This perspective refers to the strong influence of history and culture on the events that shape an individual's life. To put it into a military perspective, Veterans returning home from Vietnam had a very different experience and outlook of their military service and combat experiences than those of Veterans returning from World War II, or even more dramatically so than Veterans returning from the first Gulf War. The changing place in history between these different groups of vets drastically changed their perception of their involvement in these wars and, in turn, their life trajectories.

3. Time. This principle refers to the time at which life changing events occur over the course of an individual's life. An event can drastically change the outcomes of a person's life trajectory if it comes too early for them to handle such an altering event or too late for the person to capitalize on the opportunity. Ryan Kelty and David Segal in *Life Course Perspectives on Military Service* were able to connect this principle to time at which people choose to join the military (Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal 2010). They found that choosing military service at a younger age (18-22), men from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to overcome their life course trajectories and capitalize on opportunities that made changes to their educational and socioeconomic outcomes. However males in mid-career (30-35) who joined the military suffered penalties to their life course as the transition disrupted well established trajectories in their occupations and family lives (Kelty and Segal 2013).
4. Linked Lives. This perspective refers to the social structures that dominate many aspects of our lives. Both the social structures that we choose, such as family and friends, and the passive social structures that we belong to, such as the country and ethnic group, are intricate webs in which many individuals are linked to others through group identities. In the context of military service, a person's current relationships that will be disrupted or the new relationships that will be established can be a factor in their decision to make a life altering choice, like joining the military.
5. Lifelong development is the centerpiece of the life course theory as it is the idea that an individual is shaped and continues to be shaped by the different historical events that have occurred to that specific individual. Not a single thing, yet the amalgamation of all

the choices, events, opportunities and tragedies that have occurred in a person's life is the reason as to why they have developed into the being that they are today.

This holistic analysis is the most encompassing approach to determining the impact of military service and Veterans status on a person's life. The theory will guide and inform the metrics that I will use to determine the impact of the post-9/11 GI Bill on African American Veterans.

Military Service on Socioeconomic Status

Since the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, the literature regarding military service and its effects on socioeconomic outcomes is based largely around Veterans successful utilization of their VA educational benefits. When determining the effectiveness of military service or Veteran status on an individual's socioeconomic status, the attainment of higher education is a powerful indicator of a positive change to that individual life-course trajectory (Wilmoth and London 2013). Much of this research is aimed at how military service or Veteran status affects the occupational status, educational attainment, and socioeconomic advancement of Veterans (MacLean and Elder 2007, Wilmoth and London 2013). This research explores whether or not the positive and negative aspects of military service differ across type of service, individuals or social groups, and across different time periods.

In general Veteran status has fluctuated between beneficial and detrimental to specific groups at different historical time periods. For example, Veterans of World War II who were the first to receive the benefits of public policy and support in the form of the newly instituted Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, achieved gains in socioeconomic status over their non-Veteran counterparts (Elder 1987, Sampson and Laub 1996). However the same was not

true for Veterans of Vietnam, where the white male Veteran majority earned 15% less than their non-Veteran counterparts up to a decade after their service (MacLean and Elder 2007).

Additionally during the All-Volunteer Force era that started in 1973, white male Veterans earned more while in the military and less after the transition to civilian life, than their non-Veteran counterparts (MacLean and Elder 2007). However, Veterans of historically disadvantaged groups have experienced greater educational attainment and socioeconomic advancement when compared to their non-Veteran counterparts in all periods in which the social, cultural, political and economic structures were not actively enforcing racial segregation (MacLean and Elder 2007, Wilmoth and London 2013, Bennett and McDonald 2013). The research has thoroughly investigated the impact of military service on socioeconomic advancement, and this project will contribute to this body of knowledge by examining the higher education attainment for historically disadvantaged groups of racial minorities during the post-9/11 GI Bill era of the All-Volunteer Force.

Challenging Transition From Soldier to Student

The transition of Veteran from soldier to student has been well researched in many forms. In addition to the normal demands of attending an institution of higher learning, returning Veterans face many challenges during the transition back into civilian life. These challenges include, but are not limited to, sustained employment, adequate health-care, stable housing and access to VA educational benefits information (Teachman 2005, Jenner 2017, Ottley 2014). Aside from these primary requirements to obtaining a stable life, during the transition back into civilian life, Veterans face obstacles in being a nontraditional student when pursuing a postsecondary education. A review of the research has identified interpersonal relationships,

financial means, and social challenges, such as acculturation to the campus as being primary challenges to student Veterans transition (Jenner 2017).

However, the difficulties that Veterans face have historically been compounded for African Americans who face additional challenges upon returning from active duty. These difficulties include low socioeconomic status, a return to neighborhoods that have little to no access to quality healthcare facilities or employment opportunities, and institutionalized racism that is still prevalent throughout American society (Ottley 2014). It has been established that access to higher education is the most important element to societal mobility for African American Veterans (Ottley 2014). Unencumbered, the educational benefits of the GI Bill could greatly affect the life course of African American Veterans. In Katznelson's (2006) book *When Affirmative Action was White*, he details the extent to which returning African American Veterans who fought across Europe and Asia did not receive the same treatment upon returning to civilian life, as their white counterparts (Katznelson 2006). Most significantly in the Jim Crow Era of the south, the benefits of the GI Bill were systematically denied to non-white minorities, a practice that went unchallenged by northern legislators (Katznelson 2006). The legacy of racial disparity of discriminatory practices still exists and influences African Americans in society today.

Methods

This research project is designed to ascertain the influence of the United States Veterans Affairs post-9/11 GI Bill's educational benefits on the income and educational levels of minority populations, specifically African American males. The population of Black men was chosen because 1) the military is 92% male and 2) African American males as a population have

consistently had one of the lowest college attendance and bachelors degree attainment in the US. This research took place in Los Angeles County, California and targeted male African American Veterans who are currently utilizing their VA educational benefits to go to college. For this study I utilized a mixed methodological approach, that included both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, because neither quantitative nor qualitative data collection could answer the research question sufficiently by itself. The quantitative data was utilized to compare statistical differences between Veterans and their non-Veteran counterparts. The qualitative data involved human subjects that participated in a single interview to determine common themes and challenges that Veterans transitioning back to civilian life face and their perspective on the impact of Veteran status and the GI Bill on their lives. The research question is as follows:

Research Question

- **Do Veteran Affairs educational benefits for military services, specifically the post-9/11 GI Bill, improve the lives of African Americans over their non-military counterparts?**

Improved lives will be defined as:

- Higher college attendance rates when compared to same population that did not join the military (Attainment of higher education is a major factor in determining social mobility (Wilmoth and London 2013)).
- Higher income levels when compared to same population that did not join the military.
- The perception of Black Veterans on whether or not military service is a more advantages life-course trajectory.

This research project will contribute to the body of knowledge around the impacts and effects of VA educational benefits, specifically the post-9/11 GI Bill on African Americans socioeconomic status.

Quantitative

For the quantitative portion of this study I utilized data and information provided by government institutions to establish the baseline of statistical difference between African American males that entered into military service and those that did not. The following reports and data sets were analyzed :

- 2015 Demographic report by the Department of Defense (DoD) to understand the racial makeup of the all active duty military personnel in 2015.
- The VA Profile of Veterans: Male Education Deep Dive 2015 Report from National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS).
- Military Service History and VA Benefit Utilization Statistics Minority Veterans Report from NCVAS March 2017
- The VA Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans 2015 Report from NCVAS.
- Finally the US American Community Survey (ACS) census data from 2005 and 2015.
- I used the 2015 ACS census data as the base for the quantitative comparison.

Additionally I compared it to the several VA demographics reports that are currently available.¹ All of these reports were used as a comparison to the 2015 ACS census data to

¹ Though the military keeps its own data sets on specific demographics, this data is not readily available to the general public. Additionally once an individual becomes a Veteran the military no longer collects data on this individual and any information is handed over to Veterans Affairs. While the VA publishes reports about the Veteran population, their data is collected from the US Census. If they have any internal data sets about the income and demographics of their Veteran population, it is not released for public consumption.

determine the income levels and college attendance rates between Veterans and their non-Veteran counterparts.

Data for this analysis was derived from the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).² The universe for this analysis is the civilian population 17 years and older living in the United States and Puerto Rico. This universe includes a weighted estimate of 18.9 million Veterans, of which 1.6 million were women. The universe includes a weighted estimate of 255 million civilian population, of which 236 million were non-Veterans.

I examined the income levels of Veterans after their separation from the military. The point is to establish a metric of lifetime wealth generation, as income is a primary indicator of change in socioeconomic status. Additionally, I compared the rates of college attendance for African American Veterans and compared them to the levels of attendance for African Americans straight out of high school because, attainment of a college degree is another primary indicator of a positive change in an individual's life-course trajectory (Wilmoth and London 2013).

Qualitative

This portion of the study focused on the lived experiences of military Veterans transitioning into the civilian life and the new identity of student Veteran. This approach was used to understand the perspectives of Black Veterans on the influence of the post-9/11 GI Bill in their lives. Specifically, do they face challenges transitioning from soldier to student? Are these challenges amplified because of their race? Does the GI Bill help to facilitate their goals through

² The ACS is an ongoing survey that provides annual data on the social and economic characteristics of the U.S. population. The ACS uses a series of monthly samples to produce annually updated data for the same small areas (census tracts and block groups) formerly surveyed via the decennial census long-form sample.

these challenges and do they perceive their military service as having a positive impact on their life course trajectory? To better understand these lived experiences, I conducted personal interviews with 6 participants. The interviews did not last for more than an 45 minutes at a time and was conducted at locations on the Pasadena City College and Santa Monica College campus that were most comfortable to the interviewee. The interviews were used to extract themes and or challenges that are faced by African American Veterans that are unique to their specific experience.

During the interviews I used a recording device, (personal cell phone) for the purpose of careful note documentation. Aside from this there was no additional equipment that must be used to replicate the study. This research project complies with all the rules and regulations set forth by Occidental College Institutional Review Board. The interview participants were chosen at random and recruited by the researcher for their military service and current GI Bill enrollment.

Limitations

The 2005 and 2015 ACS Census data does not break down the data into the specific category that would be useful for my desired comparisons. Though the Census data could be arranged to compare Veteran to non-Veteran, it does not break down to specific race and gender categories. This limitation made it impossible to compare Black male Veterans to their Black male non-Veteran counterparts in the specific metrics that would answer my research question directly. A comparison of the Veteran status to non-Veteran status included all races and both genders. In other words, I could make categories of Veteran status and race, however that would include both men and women. Or I could make a category of Veteran status and gender but that would include all races.

Veterans are predominantly men (around 92%) whereas over half of all non-Veterans are women. This difference is particularly important to remember when doing any economic comparisons. In general, men earn more, are more likely to be employed, less likely to be single parents, and less likely to live in poverty than women (VA Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans 2015; US Census ACS 2015). Any economic differences between the total Veteran population and the total non-Veteran population will be exaggerated by the differences in the sex ratios of the two groups.

Veterans are significantly older than non-Veterans (VA Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans 2015). Veteran median age is around 64 compared with 44 for non-Veterans (VA Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans 2015; US Census ACS 2015). Any characteristics correlated with age (e.g., employment, disability, income) will be significantly affected by the differences in the age distributions of the two groups.

There are issues of selection bias in any comparison of Veterans and non-Veterans. Individuals in the All-Volunteer Force are not randomly selected into the Armed Forces (VA Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans 2015). They choose to enlist and are then chosen by the military based on specific criteria, both mental and physical, that may set them apart from the population who chose not to enlist (Zhang 2017; VA Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans 2015). Any effects ascribed to military service may be attributable to pre-service characteristics and not necessarily Veteran status. (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics March 2017)

Findings and Analysis

Veteran Status' Impact on Educational Attainment is Inconclusive

To answer the question of whether or not VA educational benefits improve the lives of African American males, it is important to examine the college attainment of this population, as college attainment is a marker of positive life-course trajectory (Wilmoth and London 2013). For this research, I have defined college educational attainment as the obtainment of a bachelor's degree from an accredited 4 year college. Additionally I have chosen to take a snapshot of educational attainment in 2005 and 2015 to compare the influence of the montgomery GI Bill versus the post-9/11 GI Bill that went into effect in August of 2009.

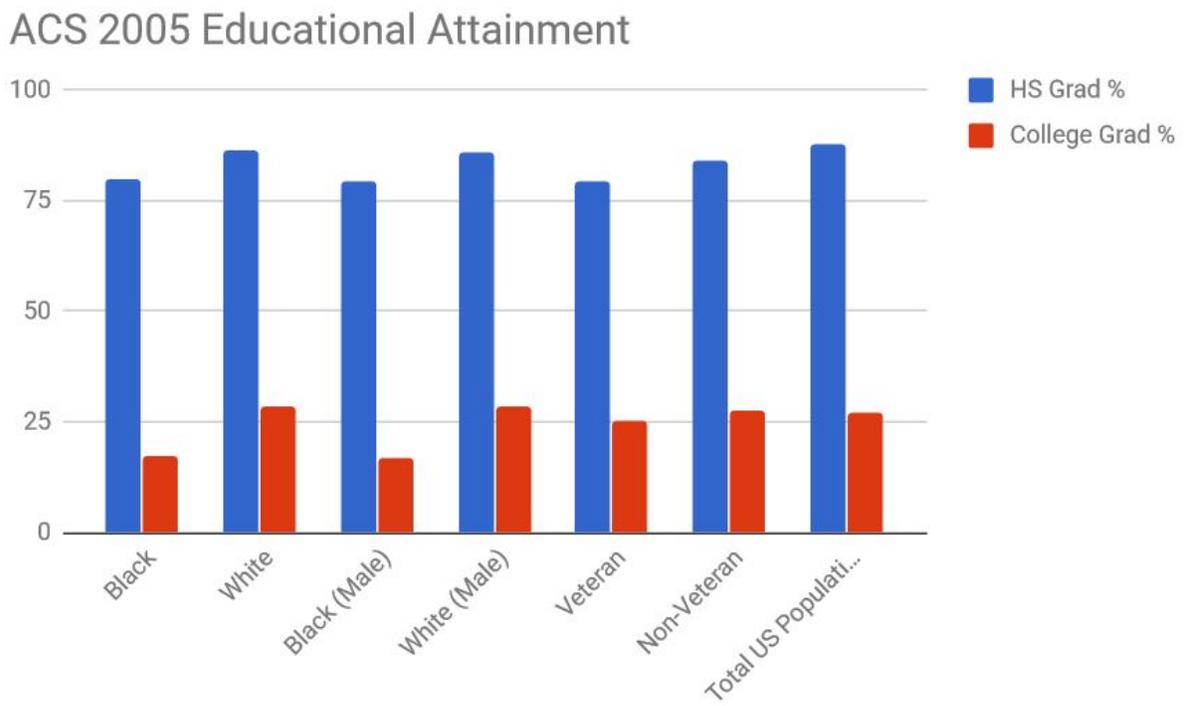
In 2005, 10.9% of the total US population were officially designated Veterans, of which 85% of those Veterans identified as white and 10.1% of those identified as Black. By 2015, these numbers changed to 8.3% of the US population were designated Veterans, of which 83.5% identified as white and 11.3% identified as Black. A comparative analysis of the Census data between 2005 and 2015 shows an increase in college educational attainment across all of the categories examined. Bachelor's degree attainment rose significantly for Black and white males, which in turn, slightly raised the college attainment over the entire categories of the white and Black populations. However there were very minimal positive gains for the Veteran status category, which is consistent with findings (Zhang 2017) that the switch from the Montgomery GI bill to the post-9/11 GI bill had a small but positive impact on college attainment. In 2005, individuals with the Veteran status graduated college at a rate of 25.3%, and that number rose to 27% in 2015. This evidence shows that those with Veteran status utilized the Montgomery GI Bill at about the same rate as the Post-9/11 GI bill in their college attainment. However,

unfortunately college attainment for Black men between 2005 and 2015 rose a meager 0.4%.

This stagnant statistic represents the entire African American male category to include Veterans attending college on their educational benefits.

Figure 1 shows that in 2005, Black college attainment was 17.3% and Black male college attainment was 16.6%. When Black college attainment is compared to the US population, which stood at 27.2%, there is a difference of 10.6%. This gap was approximately the same by the year 2015 which had a difference between Black college attainment (19.5%) and the total US population (29.8%) of 10.3%. Additionally in 2005 Veteran college attainment was at 25.3% versus non-Veteran college attainment at 27.4% and total US population at 27.2%. This leaves a difference of 1.9% between the college attainment of Veterans and the college attainment of the total US population.

Figure 1. College Attainment Levels 2005

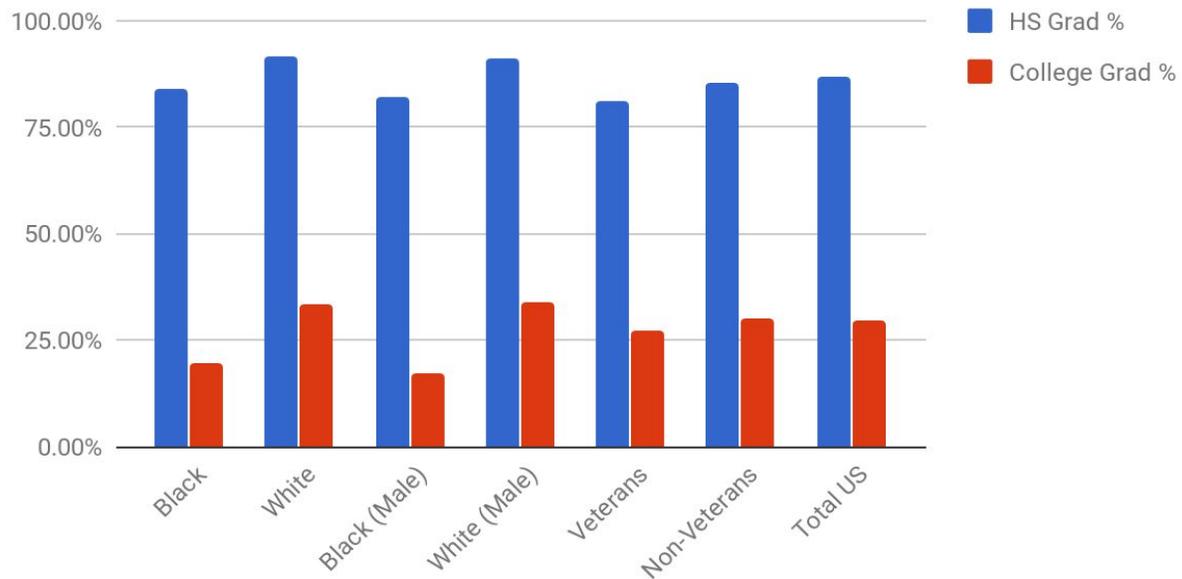


(2005 American Community Survey Census Data from AmericanFactFinder.com)

Over this ten year span the gap between Black college attainment when compared to the total US population dropped by 12.0% (Figure 2). In 2015, total Black college attainment was 19.5% with Black male college attainment at 17%. When comparing Black college attainment (19.5%) to the college attainment of the total US population, which stood at 29.8%, there is a difference of 10.3%. Additionally, in 2015, the college attainment of Veteran was at 27% and the college attainment for non-Veterans was at 30% while the rate for the entire US population was at 29.8% college attainment. The Veteran population’s college attainment rate rose little over its 2005 number of 27.4%, yet it is still lower than the non-Veteran rate and the total population college attainment.

Figure 2. College Attainment Levels 2015

ACS 2015 Educational Attainment



(2015 American Community Survey Census Data from AmericanFactFinder.com)

Over the course of this decade, in all of these categories, the rate of college attainment has gone up. However, the Black male category stayed approximately the same over the ten years despite gains in every other population. There are some problems with the ACS comparison. The census data does not break down the data in such a way that I can accurately compare civilian Black males with Veteran Black males. The data allows for comparisons of Veteran to non-Veterans or gender or race, but it fails to group into a combination of these different categories. So there must be other factors to consider to correctly answer the question of whether or not the VA education benefits makes an impact on Black men's economic mobility.

Veteran Status has a Positive Impact on Economic Factors

To determine the impact of military service on economic outcomes, I examined the difference of specific economic factors between the Veteran and non-Veteran populations. These economic factors include, but are not limited to, employment status, median income over the past 12 months, labor force participation, the unemployment rate, the amount of individuals of that population that had an income below the poverty line with in the last 12 months, and the percent of individuals in that population that are currently making below the poverty level.

Table 1. Comparison of Economic Indicators for Veteran Status in 2005

Income Levels (2005)	Median Income	Labor Force Participation %	Unemployment Rate %	Income below poverty level %
Veteran	33,973	78.3	5.5	5.8
Non-Veteran	23,952	77	6.7	12.3
African American (household)	30,939	65.7	13.2	
White (household)	49,453	65.7	5.7	
US Population	25,194	77.1	6.6	11.6

(Table 1 2005 American Community Survey Census Data from AmericanFactFinder.com.)

In 2005, individuals with Veteran status had a higher median income than those with non-Veteran status across the board, and approximately \$8,000 more than the average of the total US population. Though the levels of labor force participation is fairly level across the board, those with Veteran status were slightly higher. Additionally, the unemployment rate for Veterans was a full point lower than their non-Veteran counterparts. Furthermore, the percent of individuals that have Veteran status that made an income that was below the federal poverty line in 2005 was more than half that of their non-Veteran counterparts and the total US population. These numbers show that in several economic factors, individuals with Veteran status had an increased advantage over their non-Veteran counterparts and the total US population in general. Veterans are employed at higher rates with higher average pay, indicating that having Veteran status improves an individual's economic status.

In 2015, the impact of Veteran status on these economic factors is still significantly better than other populations. For 2015, the median income over the past 12 months for individuals with Veteran status was over \$10,000 higher than their non-Veteran counterparts. The labor force participation is approximately the same across the board with both non-Veteran populations and the total US population having a slight increase over Veterans. This can be attributed to the higher rates of disability among combat Veterans that have accumulated over the course of two active war zones. However in the unemployment rate, Veterans have nearly a full point advantage over the US population in general. Additionally the percent of individuals who have Veteran status that earn an income under the federal poverty line is half that of their

non-Veteran counterparts. In 2015, individuals with Veteran status had more jobs at better pay than their non-Veteran counterparts.

Table 2. Comparison of Economic Indicators for Veteran Status in 2015

Income Levels (2015)	Median Income	Labor Force Participation %	Unemployment Rate %	Income below poverty level %
Veteran	37469	75.1	7.3	7.1
Non-Veteran	26436	75.8	8.2	14.2
African American (household)	36,544	62.2	14.8	
White (household)	59,698	63.5	7.1	
US Population	27306	75.7	8.2	13.6

(Table 2 2015 American Community Survey Census Data from AmericanFactFinder.com)

Data Analysis

The census data shows that in educational attainment and the outlined economic factors, Veteran status has improved the lives of people over their non-Veteran counterparts. An examination of the two snapshots in time show that in 2005 and in 2015 a person with Veteran status has a distinct advantage in the economic factors that determine an individual's ability to move up the socioeconomic ladder. Veterans were employed at higher rates, had higher personal incomes, and were less likely to live below the poverty level than non-Veterans. In college attainment, though Veterans increased their college attendance rates in 2015 from 2005, it was still lower than their non-Veteran counterparts by 3%, indicating that despite access to the GI Bill, Veterans still attended college at nearly the same rates as the rest of the population. However this discrepancy can be attributed to the varying age difference in the Veteran population. Though the percent of Blacks attaining a bachelor's degree rose slightly, it remained fairly stagnant at about 17% for Black males. Based off of this census data alone, I can not

definitively affirm that the post-9/11 GI Bill has a positive impact on Black male college attainment. However, the data shows that Veteran status has a marked improvement in both economic factors such as income levels and unemployment rate, and in college attainment levels over their non-Veteran counterparts when age adjusted for 18-24. While this is not a direct comparison of Veterans versus non-Veterans I can identify and compare trends. If Veteran status has economic advantages over the non-Veteran population, and better college attainment levels than African American men, then I will assume that a term of military service has a positive impact on the life-course trajectory of African American males. To get a better understanding of how the post-9/11 GI Bill directly improves the lives of Black men it will be important to interview individuals who are involved with the program directly.

Table 3. Interviews with Veterans Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill

Participants	Age	Hometown	Branch of Military	Term of Service	Combat Deployment
Roosevelt	24	Atlanta, GA	Marines	4 years	OIF 2010
Gabe	27	Las Vegas, NA	Marines	4 years	OEF 2010; OEF 2012
Doug	26	Minneapolis, MN	Navy	5 years	None
Josphat	26	Wahpeton, ND	Marines	5 years	OEF 2012
Melvin	33	Houston, TX	Navy	6 years	None
Isaac	27	South Carolina	Air Force	4 years	None

OIF=Operation Iraqi Freedom OEF= Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan)

To better understand whether or not VA educational benefits have an impact on African American male economic mobility, it is important to listen to what individuals in the population think about its impact on them. For this project, I conducted six interviews with African American male Veterans who are in the process of utilizing their VA educational benefits. Common themes that have come out of the six interviews are:

No Economic Mobility For African Americans: Each of the interview participants recognized that, from their perspective, there were very few pathways to economic success out of the predominately African American neighborhoods they came from. The participants each mentioned the differences both culturally and economically between White and Black communities in the United States. Though the participants were all from different places across the US, they all identified an insular African American community that was resource neglected and culturally ostracized from mainstream white America.

“If you’re not an athlete, or academic wiz or pursuing a career in rapping, and you come from a single parent household, and your single parent has a high school education, I think there is very few options and I think that the three that i listed are the biggest if not the only options outside of the military. I’m not say, you can’t make it anywhere else, Im just saying what I’ve seen, what i still continue to see when i look at the people who are back in my neighborhood... Either they are dead or in jail” (Gabriel, 1/29/2018)

This cultural ordeal has led to a desire by all of the participants to “escape” or “change [their] environment because [they] didn’t want to have only one perspective” of the way life should be for African American males (Melvin, 2/16/2018). Furthermore, several participants described their family and friends as “stagnant” and perceived them as not advancing along the socioeconomic ladder. Though all participants talked about the insular African American culture within the US, many expressed an ability to overcome that cultural separation through a concerted effort to break normal routines and rituals.

Inability to Afford College Tuition After High School Graduation: Though all of the interviews expressed the belief of having an educational pathway out of their hometown situation, none of the participants believed they had the financial capability to attend college directly out of high school. All of the interviewees expressed a concern of taking on school loans

and not being able to complete college and still being saddled with massive debt. All of the individuals who expressed this concern believed it to be the most prevalent problem facing young Black men after the completion of high school. Another interviewee described his hometown neighborhood in north Las Vegas as a, “blackhole” in which it was very hard for people who grew up in these conditions to escape (Gabriel, 1/29/2018).

Black Veterans Continue to Face Racial Challenges: None of the participants indicated that there were issues or challenges that they faced at the organizational level of these specific school that was due to or compounded by their race. Even though each of the participants expressed an awareness of racial challenges that are particular to African Americans, all of the participants articulated that the racial discrimination that they had seen or been subjected too was from everyday interactions with American society. Many of the interviewees identified the social pressure exerted on them through preconceptions and stereotypes of how young Black men behave. These individuals believed that these were challenges that they faced because of their race and they believed that Veterans of other races didn’t understand these additional challenges.

“I’m still Black so I’m still surface judged first, then talked to after. Like, it’s usually once they find out that I was in [the military], and I like recently got out, they’re like, ‘oh, oh what’s going on? Alright!, That’s great, alright I’m so sorry I thought you were a piece of shit five seconds ago.” (Doug, 2/2/2018).

A few participants expressed repeated uncommon encounters law enforcement and attributed this to being, “a young Black man with [financial stability] that comes from being a Vet” (Roosevelt, 1/29/2018) Though the participants believed that African American men encounter the police at a much higher rate than other races within the US, they also articulated that their Veteran status helped to quickly resolve these excess encounters. Josphat relayed his

experience of being pulled over by the police all the time because of the car he drives. “I get pulled over twice, three times a month, and they always hit me with the same routine.... Then they look at my ID that say Veteran, and the stickers on my car and change their tune. I always wonder what it would be like if I wasn’t a Veteran” (Josphat, 2/14/2018). He describes the encounters as being, “always on edge” with a strong sense of uncertainty of how this process will be resolved.

All of the interviewees expressed the belief that while race still plays an important role in our society, they found little racism in the federal institutions that they had experience with.

“I think as a Black man, to me race is always there, I mean, and there is always like a low-key chip on my shoulder. But as far as what I’ve experienced since I got out [of military service] you know, dealing with the VA, I haven’t felt race has necessarily played a part in anything. From what I understand it is hit or miss with the VA anyway, no matter what your color is.” (Gabriel, 1/29/2018)

The majority of the participants did not face institutional racism while being a member of the US Armed Forces. “The good thing about the military is that race is not a factor from what I’ve seen. Everybody gets treated as slaves! [laughs] especially in the Marine corps” (Josphat, 2/14/2018). Though there were a few stories of racial prejudices within the ranks it was from fellow soldier of same or near rank and not from supervisor or commanding officers. Gabriel explained that while integration is a legitimate goal the military can go to far in dismissing the effects of race on an individual's perception or understanding of how the world works.

Military Service as Transformative on Veterans Life-Course Trajectory: All of the participants agreed that Veteran status had an overall positive impact on their lives. Many of the participants expressed an ambition to circumvent the previously identified challenges facing the African American. It was universally stated that there was a strong desire in all of the

participants to extract themselves from their surroundings and environment after high school completion, and the military gave them this avenue to escape. Furthermore the chance to travel overseas was described as desirable for all the participants because it allows for a widening of their cultural and social perspectives. “I believe a lot of ignorance comes from people not being able to leave where they were born at” (Doug, 2/2/2018). All of the interviewees found great value in the dispelling of their perceived ignorance.

Military Integration is Transformative on Racial Barriers: A majority of participants accredited their military service as driving force for integration, that dismantled cultural barriers like race and age in both soldiers they observed and within themselves. Additionally all the participants expressed an extreme sense of gratitude for their current life circumstances after witnessing the hardships of local nationals in the warzones of Iraq and Afghanistan.

“I feel like my life is great. I’ve seen little Afghan kids and Iraqi kids and I realize, these little kids are happy for chocolate. They’re happy when you give them anything, like, everyone in the US takes things granted, even myself included before I went there and I still feel like I take it for granted, so I’m doing my best to make sure I humble myself.” (Roosevelt, 1/29/2018)

Furthermore, a few participants expressed their transformation as disruptive to their previous friendships and relationships. Upon separation from the military, soldiers would return home to an insular African American community and feel, ”out of place,” with one participant describing his return as, “I returned home for 30 days and I realized... I joined the military to get away from those people” (Roosevelt, 1/29/2018). This was in no way described as a negative, but as an acknowledgement of the benefits of a servicemembers mindset to take the initiative and get after their personal goals.

Additionally the camaraderie of a close knit unit has been a major plus for all of the interviewees. Every one of the participants described a close relationship with their fellow service members that reaches across social divides like race and class. Furthermore, this camaraderie is especially missed as the Veteran transitions to student because of issues of relatability to the social and cultural hierarchies that they encounter at institutions of higher educations. Five of the six participants expressed a need for and value of, a Veteran population at the school that they are attending (Roosevelt 1/29/2018, Gabriel 1/29/2018, Doug 2/2/2018, Josphat, 2/14/2018). It was a much easier transition for Veterans who could find friends or individuals who could understand the mentality and lifestyle of a soldier.

VA Education Benefits Have a Positive Impact on Black Veterans Lives: Of the benefits available to military service members, the education benefits in the form of the post-9/11 GI Bill was recognized by all of the interviewees as the most beneficial portion to the GI Bill of rights. All of the participants asserted that the educational benefits provided by the VA were an absolute positive on their lives and was a driving factor in their educational attainment. Across the board, the participants expressed the importance of the post-9/11 GI Bills ability to alleviate the financial burden of attaining higher education. “The biggest benefit is definitely the, I don’t have to worry about working as much, because I know the BAH (Basic Allowance for Housing) will cover me for awhile, you know so I can concentrate on my school, concentrate on getting that good GPA” (Josphat, 2/14/2018). By covering tuition and providing a monthly stipend while the Veteran is enroll, the GI bill primary benefit is that it allows the Veteran to focus 100% on his education. Though many of the interviewees expressed a slight disbelief or disdain for the need for college degrees it was universally recognized as a necessary step in obtaining a good job that

would elevate them out of their socioeconomic status. Furthermore all of the individuals who talked about the requirement of higher education to obtain gainful employment expressed a strong belief in the post-9/11 GI Bill's ability to facilitate this desired outcome.

Lack of VA Educational Information: Half of the interviewees described a failure of the separation process and programs to really explain to individuals leaving the service what VA benefits they were entitled to upon separation. Additionally those interviewees who did receive a debrief about their earned benefits judged it inadequate in explaining the specifics of the VA educational benefits. "The educational side [of separation programs] They don't really go in depth about that, they just want you to get a job and don't be homeless, that's kind of their biggest thing" (Josphat, 2/14/2018). The interviewees communicated that it was their understanding that separation programs leaned on the capability of the higher education institution to provide answers to their questions about the GI Bill.

Additionally the biggest complaint about the GI Bill was the proration of education benefits based on time and date. Five of the six participants revealed that the monthly stipend was prorated to the exact end date of their college attendance. This left a gap in the financial support they received as part of the post-9/11 GI Bill benefits leaving some Veterans without enough money to cover their financial obligations in the school break months during summer and winter.

"I was really confused as to why they would do something like that, because just because you prorate [GI Bill benefits] doesn't mean that my rent is prorated. Alright, like my rent doesn't change, my rent is still the same. So why would you then put me in that situation? If the whole point of the allowance is for me not to have to work and worry and just focus on school why would you then take money away... I don't understand the thought process." (Doug, 2/2/2018)

Aside from the proration of the allotted benefits, interviewees were concerned about the length of the available benefits, with the majority expressing that the limit of 36 months of benefits is not satisfactory. The current 36 Months of tuition coverage barely secures the time required to attain a bachelor's degree, at a time in college when individuals are encouraged to explore what it is they want to dedicate themselves too. The current timeline requires an individual to understand what career they want to major in before they begin to draw educational benefits or risk having their educational benefits expire before the completion of their degree.

Additionally some classes that are required by an institution as a transfer requirement or for a particular major may be designated excessive to the certifying official and a Veteran won't be able to utilize their education benefits to take those required courses.

Positive Recommendations for Military Service: All of the interviewees expressed a strong intention of recommending military service to other African Americans. Though they may have biases being prior military themselves each of the interviews believed that a term of military service not only enabled them to financially afford the option to go to college but the experience of becoming a soldier was a valued end by itself. Several of the interviewees explained how hard it was for them to find gainful employment in their home town and asserted how the military was an excellent option for African Americans who found themselves in the same situation.

Additionally it was the opinion of all of the participants that young African American males needed more discipline and leadership, both of which can be found in military service. "What I noticed when I was in, If you didn't have a focus when you got in [the military], you had focus when you got out" (Doug, 2/2/2018)

Military service and its integrated force gives African Americans the opportunity to interact with white Americans on an individual basis which helps to relieve some of the stereotypes around white American culture and the American government. Both Roosevelt and Josphat describe relationships with close white friends that were forged in the overcoming of challenges faced on deployment.

Furthermore, the participants of these interviews recognized that there may be a hesitation for African Americans to support and defend a government that has historically mistreated its Black population. Josphat described this as an “Uncle Sam mentality,” and believed that young Black men view government authority as hostile and negative to the Black community. However, several participants reconciled this dissonance with the belief that African Americans can not change the American government from the outside. “Once you dig into the system that's like, fighting against you, and your able to transform it and mold it in the way that you want, than its gonna work for you” (Doug, 2/2/2018). It was expressed to me that protesting from the outside can incite change, but the best way to transform a system as big as the US government, it is necessary to delve into the system itself.

Recommendations

The post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits is not only the most attractive incentive offered by the military but, according to individual in the program, successful in facilitating their goals of college attainment. This report recommends small changes to the post-9/11 GI Bill that can further increase its impact on the economic mobility of Veterans of all colors. These recommendation are primarily drawn for the interviews of Veterans currently involved in the GI

Bill program. Implementation would ensure that more Veterans utilize their educational benefits, thus positively impacting their college attainment and life-course trajectories.

Extend the Benefit Schedule to 48 Months to Match the Minimum of a Bachelor's Degree:

Though the GI Bill is a strong investment in a Veterans ability to achieve economic mobility, it falls short of fulfilling that objective by being inconsistent with its overall benefits schedule.

Through a typical accredited college, a 4-year bachelor's degree would average a 48 month commitment to complete the necessary course requirements. However, the GI Bill benefits schedule allows for a maximum of 36 months. This discrepancy puts unnecessary pressure on Veterans during their transition back to civilian life and their new student identity. Additionally this artificially imposed limitation can force Veterans into community colleges and educational programs that they can afford instead of the educational pathway they desire. An extension of the allotted months of benefits should be boosted from 36 to 48 months. This would be more inline with the 4 year requirement that is the minimum that most schools require for attaining a bachelor's degree.

Discontinue the Proration of Education Benefits Based on Class Time: In addition to the low limit to educational benefits earned for the sacrifices Veterans have made, there is a proration procedure that is detrimental to the objective of the GI Bill. The educational benefits issued are subject to proration depending on wildly different semester schedules across the country.

Depending on the start and stop times of semesters or vacation breaks in class, a Veteran is uncertain about the amount of benefits they will receive on a month to month basis. Veterans who are enrolled at a school should not be subject to changing pay rates due to different school

schedules across the country. Removing this would relieve the financial pressure on the Veteran who can not be sure if they can pay their monthly bills.

Reducing VA Bureaucracy Interactions and Errors By Directly Issuing Benefits to

Veterans: Although the GI Bill's educational benefits have been earned by an honorably discharged Veteran, the VA does not believe that a Veteran should have complete access to their benefits, or that they are capable of implementing successful strategies of attending college on their own. The Veteran is not to be trusted with the already earned benefits, so the VA has established a sometimes impenetrable bureaucracy, that cuts the Veteran out of the process of paying the tuition of a college. This leads to the inevitable mistakes and mishaps that occur when a government bureaucracy interacts with the bureaucracy of an institution of higher learning. Culminating in Veterans being dropped out of school for a semester, leaving them with no access to earned benefits, or the VA overpaying the tuition of a college. The payment of college tuition should be approved by the VA then given to the Veteran who has already earned the benefits, instead of direct payments from the VA to the institution of higher learning. This would reduce the burden of proof on the VA and the risk to the Veteran for any mistakes or repayment claims that can arise between the bureaucracies.

These were the most identified problems with the current post-9/11 GI Bill. If the objective is to invest in the success of the most honorable individuals in our society, then removing these barriers would not only ensure the successful achievement of this objective. Though Veterans have earned these educational benefits through great sacrifice for our country, it is issued from the Government in a reluctant and patronizing way. Implementing these changes to the policy would not only improve college attainment rates for Veterans utilizing their

educational benefits it would increase the number of Veterans who utilize this educational program.

Conclusion

Though there were some limitations to the census data collected, this report has shown that there are positive short-term and long-term effects of VA educational benefits and the subsequent term of service, to African American life-course trajectories. The census data showed a measurable improvement in many economic factors such as income levels, unemployment rates, labor force participation and falling under poverty for Veterans over their non-Veteran counterparts (Table 1; Table 2). Furthermore, according to Black male Veterans currently on their VA educational benefits, the post-9/11 GI Bill has a positive impact on African American male economic mobility. The post-9/11 GI Bill directly covers the Veterans college tuition and most of their basic housing requirements allowing them to focus on attaining their college degree. Not only has a college degree been recognized as having a positive impact on an individual's life-course trajectory (Wilmoth and London 2013) all of the Veterans interviewed recognized the need for a college degree to advance along the socioeconomic ladder. Additionally all of the Veterans that were interviewed disclosed that without the post-9/11 GI Bill they would not have been able to afford college, which is consistent with the reality that the financial burden of college tuition is one of the biggest obstacles to African American male college attendance. All of this data indicates that the post-9/11 GI Bill has a positive impact on the lives of African American men.

This research was limited by only using census data to achieve its quantitative results. I could not directly compare the college attainment levels of African American male Veterans to

African American non-Veterans with the census data available. Instead the census data was utilized to establish the advantage of having Veteran status in a series of economic factors. I then used the information gleaned from the interviews of Veteran African American men currently on the GI Bill program for a deeper understanding of the impact of the GI Bill on this specific population. For a more definitive data analysis, future research might invite the Veterans Affairs Department to share its internal data on post-9/11 GI Bill enrollment and college attainment categorized by race and gender, then use the census data for cross reference.

Appendix

African American Involvement in Wars

Revolutionary War (1775-1783) Free African Americans fought with the colonists in the Revolutionary War against the British. On the eve of the revolution, approximately 20 percent of the colonial population of 2.5 million men were African American. (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017) As early as April, 1775, African American “minutemen” fought at Lexington and Concord (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017)

Civil War (1861-1865) Over 200,000 African Americans, many of them former slaves, served in the U.S. military forces during the Civil War. About 180,000 African Americans fought in the Union Army and another 29,000 served in the Union Navy. (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017) Of the 1,523 Medals of Honor awarded during the Civil War, twenty-three were awarded to African American service members. (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017)

World War I (1914-1918) Over 400,000 African American soldiers served in uniform during World War I, of which approximately 10 percent were assigned to combat units. Over 1,300 African Americans were commissioned as officers (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017). Although this was less than 1 percent of all officers, it was the largest number of African Americans in the commissioned grades since the entry of African American soldiers into the Army. African Americans comprised 13 percent of active duty manpower during World War I with roughly 200,000 being deployed to Europe as part of the American Expeditionary Force and the French Army.

World War II (1941-1945) In October 1940, the War Department announced that the strength of African Americans in the Army would be limited to their proportion of the general population in the United States which was approximately 10 percent.(1) Over 900,000 African American soldiers served and at the height of the African American participation, nearly 9 percent of the Army was African American.(12) Approximately, 167,000 African Americans served in the Navy (or about 4 percent of the Navy) and 17,000 served in the Marine Corps (or about 2 percent of the Marines). In 1940, the War Department opened officer candidate schools in addition to previously opened Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC) units to African Americans. By 1945, African American officers constituted roughly 1.9 percent of all officers in the military.

Korean Conflict (1950-1953) Among the 1.8 million men and women who fought in the Korean War there were more than 100,000 African Americans (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017) African American personnel made up 13 percent of the total military strength in Korea. Before 1948, they fought when they were allowed to fight, in segregated units – denied the opportunity to show their abilities in an integrated setting. However, President Truman’s 1948 Executive Order 9981 changed all that (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017). For the United States, this was the first war fought under a policy of troop integration. The 24th Infantry Regiment was disbanded early in the Korean Conflict, which completely removed the last evidence of segregation in the Army. (VA Minority Veteran Report, 2017)

Vietnam Era (1960-1973) The Vietnam War saw the highest proportion of Blacks ever to serve in an American war. During the height of the U.S. involvement, 1965-69, Blacks, who formed 11 percent of the American population, made up 12.6 percent of the soldiers in Vietnam (Butler

1999). Of the 3.14 million men who served in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos, during the Vietnam War, nearly 340,000 (10.8 percent) were African American.

The following questions were asked of the 6 interview participants:

1. Where were you recruited for your military service?
2. What branch of the military did you serve in?
3. How long was your term of service?
4. Were you involved in any combat deployments? Where and how long?
5. What was it that attracted you to the military as opposed to attending college or entering the civilian job market?
6. What was the biggest incentive that influenced you to serve in the military?
7. In your opinion what is the greatest benefit provided by the GI Bill of Rights? (home loans/ educational benefits/ health-care)
8. when separating from the military service, were you provided with access to information regarding your education benefits?
9. What are some of the challenges you face when first transitioning from soldier to student?
10. What are some challenges you still face now after transition?
11. Do you feel like your race adds to or takes away from these challenges you identified? How so?
12. Are there challenges you face being African American that other Veterans do not have to deal with?
13. Are you satisfied with the education benefits provided by the post-9/11 GI Bill?
14. How has the GI Bill benefited you? In your opinion what are the best parts? What are the worst parts?
15. In your opinion does the post-9/11 GI Bill improve the lives of Veterans?
16. If you hadn't joined the military, what do you believe you would have done?
17. Would you recommend military service to other African Americans?
18. Are there any characteristics that the military instilled in you that changed your life or that you continue to use now that you're in college?
19. Do you think that your life has been improved because of the military? Why or why not?
20. In your opinion what is the benefit of a college degree? Does the post-9/11 GI Bill help you achieve these benefits?

Bibliography

1. Ackerman, Robert, and David DiRamio. 2009. *Creating a Veteran-Friendly Campus: Strategies for Transition and Success: New Directions for Student Services*, |. John Wiley & Sons.
2. Alexander, Michelle. 2012. *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press.
3. Altschuler, Glenn, and Stuart Blumin. 2009. *The GI Bill: The New Deal for Veterans*. Oxford University Press.
4. Arminio, Jan, Tomoko Kudo Grabosky, and Josh Lang. 2014. *Student Veterans and Service Members in Higher Education*. Routledge.
5. Bedard, Kelly, and Olivier Deschênes. 2006. "The Long-Term Impact of Military Service on Health: Evidence from World War II and Korean War Veterans." *American Economic Review* 96 (1):176–94.
6. Bell, Geri L., Elizabeth A. Boland, Brian Dudgeon, and Kurt Johnson. 2013. "The Post-9/11 GI Bill: Insights From Veterans Using Department of Veterans Affairs Educational Benefits." *Rehabilitation Research, Policy, and Education* 27 (4):246–60.
<https://doi.org/10.1891/2168-6653.27.4.246>.
7. Butler, John Sibley. *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*. Copyright © 1999 by Oxford UP.
8. Coffey, David. *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Ed. Spencer C. Tucker. Oxford, UK: ABC-CLIO, 1998. Copyright © 1998 by Spencer C. Tucker.
9. DiRamio, David, and Kathryn Jarvis. 2011. *Veterans in Higher Education: When Johnny and Jane Come Marching to Campus: ASHE Higher Education Report, Volume 37, Number 3*. John Wiley & Sons.
10. Elder, Glen H. 1987. "War Mobilization and the Life Course: A Cohort of World War II Veterans." *Sociological Forum* 2 (3):449–72. 1998. "The Life Course as Developmental Theory." *Child Development* 69 (1):1–12. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1132065>.
11. Gallagher, Brianne P. 2016. "Burdens of Proof: Veteran Frauds, PTSD Pussies, and the Spectre of the Welfare Queen." *Critical Military Studies* 2 (3):139–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2016.1155861>.
12. Giele, Janet Z., and Glen H. Elder. 1998. *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. SAGE.
13. Haibach, Jeffrey, Michael Haibach, Katherine Hall, Robin Masheb, Melissa Little, Robyn Shepardson, Anne Dobbmeyer, et al. 2017. "Military and Veteran Health Behavior Research and

Practice: Challenges and Opportunities.” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 40 (1):175–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-016-9794-y>.

14. Heerwig, Jennifer A., and Dalton Conley. 2013. “The Causal Effects of Vietnam-Era Military Service on Post-War Family Dynamics.” *Social Science Research* 42 (2):299–310.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.11.003>.
15. Hewitt, Dymilah. 2016. “The Battle at Home: African American Veterans in Higher Education.” *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals* 5 (1).
<https://journals.uncc.edu/urbaned/article/view/574>.
16. Jenner, Brandy M. 2017. “Student Veterans and the Transition to Higher Education: Integrating Existing Literatures.” *Journal of Veterans Studies* 2 (2).
<https://journals.colostate.edu/jvs/article/view/139>.
17. Katznelson, Ira. 2006. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. W. W. Norton & Company.
18. Kelty, Ryan, Meredith Kleykamp, and David R. Segal. 2010. “The Military and the Transition to Adulthood.” *The Future of Children* 20 (1):181–207.
19. Kleykamp, Meredith. 2013. “Unemployment, Earnings and Enrollment among Post 9/11 Veterans.” *Social Science Research* 42 (3):836–51.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.12.017>.
20. Kleykamp, Meredith A. 2006. “College, Jobs, or the Military? Enlistment During a Time of War.” *Social Science Quarterly* 87 (2):272–90.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2006.00380.x>.
21. Lunden, Walter A. 1952. “Military Service and Criminality.” *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 42 (6):766–73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1139680>.
22. MacLean, Alair. 2005. “Lessons from the Cold War: Military Service and College Education.” *Sociology of Education* 78 (3):250–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148917>.
23. MacLean, Alair, and Glen H. Elder. 2007a. “Military Service in the Life Course.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:175–96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29737759>.
24. Mayer, Karl Ulrich. 2009. “New Directions in Life Course Research.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (August):413–33.
25. McDaniel, Anne, Thomas A. DiPrete, Claudia Buchmann, and Uri Shwed. 2011. “The Black Gender Gap in Educational Attainment: Historical Trends and Racial Comparisons.” *Demography* 48 (3):889–914. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-011-0037-0>.

26. Moore, Corey L., Ningning Wang, Jean Johnson, Edward O. Manyibe, Andre L. Washington, and Atashia Muhammad. 2016. "Return-to-Work Outcome Rates of African American Versus White Veterans Served by State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies: A Randomized Split-Half Cross-Model Validation Research Design." *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin* 59 (3):158–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034355215579917>.
27. Ottley, Alford H. 2014a. "Empty Promise: Black American Veterans and the New GI Bill." *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education* 2014 (144):79–88. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20116>.
28. Parker, Christopher S. 2009. *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South*. Princeton University Press.
29. "PsycNET Record Display - PsycNET." n.d. Accessed October 1, 2017. </record/2017-19411-014>.
30. Radford, Alexandria Walton, Alexander Bentz, Remmert Dekker, and Jonathan Paslov. 2016. *After the Post-9/11 GI Bill: A Profile of Military Service Members and Veterans Enrolled in Undergraduate and Graduate Education. Stats in Brief. NCES 2016-435*. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED568400>.
31. Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright Publishing.
32. Routon, P. Wesley. 2014. "The Effect of 21st Century Military Service on Civilian Labor and Educational Outcomes." *Journal of Labor Research; New York* 35 (1):15–38. <https://doi.org/http://0-dx.doi.org.oasys.lib.oxy.edu/10.1007/s12122-013-9170-4>.
33. Rumann, Corey B., and Florence A. Hamrick. 2010. "Student Veterans in Transition: Re-Enrolling after War Zone Deployments." *The Journal of Higher Education* 81 (4):431–58. n.d. *Supporting Student Veterans in Transition*.
34. Sampson, Robert J., and John H. Laub. 1996. "Socioeconomic Achievement in the Life Course of Disadvantaged Men: Military Service as a Turning Point, Circa 1940-1965." *American Sociological Review* 61 (3):347–67. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096353>.
35. Schwartz, Saul. 1986. "The Relative Earnings of Vietnam and Korean-Era Veterans." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 39 (4):564–72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2523248>.
36. Shapiro, Thomas, Tatijana Meschede, and Sam Osoro. 2013. "The Roots of the Widening Racial Wealth Gap: Explaining the Black-White Economic Divide." *Institute of Assets and Social Policy*, February.
37. Stanley, Marcus. 2003. "College Education and the Midcentury GI Bills." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118 (2):671–708. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25053917>.

38. Steele, Jennifer L., Nicholas Salcedo, and James Coley. 2010. "Service Members in School: Military Veterans' Experiences Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Pursuing Postsecondary Education." RAND CORP SANTA MONICA CA, RAND CORP SANTA MONICA CA. <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA540408>.
39. Teachman, Jay. 2005. "Military Service in the Vietnam Era and Educational Attainment." *Sociology of Education* 78 (1):50–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148910>.
40. Teachman, Jay. 2007. "Military Service and Educational Attainment in the All-Volunteer Era." *Sociology of Education* 80 (4):359–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452717>. 2007.
41. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense for Equal Opportunity and Safety Policy. Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation , p. 15. 1985. p. 15.
42. Vacchi, David T., and Joseph B. Berger. 2014. "Student Veterans in Higher Education." In *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 93–151. Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8005-6_3.
43. Weiss, Eugenia L., and Jose E. Coll. 2016. *The Civilian Lives of U.S. Veterans: Issues and Identities [2 Volumes]*. ABC-CLIO.
44. Wilmoth, Janet M., and Andrew S. London. 2013a. *Life Course Perspectives on Military Service CH. 6*. Routledge. *Life Course Perspectives on Military Service Intro*. Routledge. 2013b.
45. Zhang, Liang. n.d. "Veterans Going to College: Evaluating the Impact of the Post-9/11 GI Bill on College Enrollment." Accessed October 1, 2017. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B-CzIORuazC6WVZJUXZHa2prRDA>.
46. U.S. Army. Hazel Johnson-Brown. African Americans in the US Army. [Online] [Cited: December 22, 2016.] <https://www.army.mil/africanamericans/profiles/johnson.html>.
47. Johnson, Shoshana. I'm Still Standing: From Captive US Soldier to Free Citizen--My Journey Home. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.
48. National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Biographical Data: Ellen Ochoa. National Aeronautics and Space Administration. [Online] October 2015. [Cited: December 22, 2016.]
49. <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/ochoa.pdf>.
50. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA History in Brief. Washington, DC : Department of Veterans Affairs.
51. Moskov, Charles. All That We Can Be. New York : Basic Books, 1996.
52. The Library of Congress. Recruiting African Americans into the Continental Army . The Library of Congress.[Online] [Cited: December 22, 2016.]

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/homefnt/recruit.html>.

53. Chancellor, Carl. After Civil War, Blacks Fought for Rights for 100 years. USA Today. May 17, 2011.
54. Brown, Corrine. World War I History Lessons. Washington DC : Congressional Record, 2015.
55. Rangel, Charles. Tribute to African-American WW II Veterans. Washington, DC : Congressional Record, 1995.
56. Greeber, Milton. The GI Bill: The Law that Changed America. New York : Lickle Publishing, Inc., 1997.
57. Truman, Harry. Executive Order 9981. Washington, DC : The White House, 1948.
58. Kulka, Richard, et al., et al. Trauma and the Vietnam Generation: Report of Findings from the National Vietnam Readjustments Study. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1990.
59. Kulka, Richard, et al., et al. National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS): Description, Current Status, and Initial PTSD Prevalence Estimates. Washington, DC : Veterans Administration, 1988.
60. Cooper, Richard V.L. Military Manpower and the All-Volunteer Force. Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1977.
61. Fligstein, Neil. Who Served in the Military. 1980, Armed Forces and Society, pp. 297-312.