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“The Two Joes Meet—Joe College, Joe Veteran”: The G.I. Bill, College Education, and Postwar American Culture

Daniel A. Clark

During World War II several popular Norman Rockwell paintings featured the soldier Willie Gillis. Rockwell depicted Willie as your average, all-American boy, a typical GI. Yet the Willie pictured on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on October 5, 1946, seemed transformed (see Plate 1). Willie sits in the window sill of his college dorm room, smoking a pipe while diligently studying. The window in the center of the picture frames the venerable college clocktower and trees on the Quad. The everyman, dogface Willie had matured. He had been transformed into a college student with an air of confident assurance, comfortable within his new genteel surroundings.¹ One could only imagine a bright future for Willie.

The metamorphosis of Willie Gillis may be viewed as a symbol of the changes wrought by the GI Bill. Willie’s symbolic transformation captures both the myth and the reality of the GI Bill. The myth grows stronger with age. The GI Bill has become a mainstay of political rhetoric – a shorthand term for any government program that seems to provide expansion of opportunity and social uplift. Numerous magazine articles commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the war’s end heralded the act as a revolutionary social program that changed both higher education and American society.² This legend persists despite the fact that some historians have already argued

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¹Norman Rockwell, Cover Illustration, *Saturday Evening Post* 219 (5 October 1946). I found no direct evidence linking Rockwell’s Willie Gillis to Bill Mauldin’s popular cartoon soldier Willie of “Willie and Joe” fame. The connection, however unintended, can reinforce the perception of Rockwell’s Willie Gillis as an average GI—a lovable “grunt”—making Willie’s collegiate transformation even more meaningful. For more on Willie and Joe from *Stars and Stripes* see Bill Mauldin, *Up Front* (New York, 1945).

²James Brady, “In Appreciation, The GI Bill,” *Parade Magazine*, 4 August 1996, 4-5; Edwin Kiester, Jr., “The G.I. Bill May Be the Best Deal Ever Made by Uncle Sam,” *Smithsonian* 25 (November 1994): 130; “Into the Future: Social Revolution,” *Life*, Special Edition, 5 June 1995, 60-61; John Norberg, *A Force for Change: The Class of 1950* (West Lafayette, IN, 1995). Writers typically credit the GI Bill with ushering in a new era of expanded educational

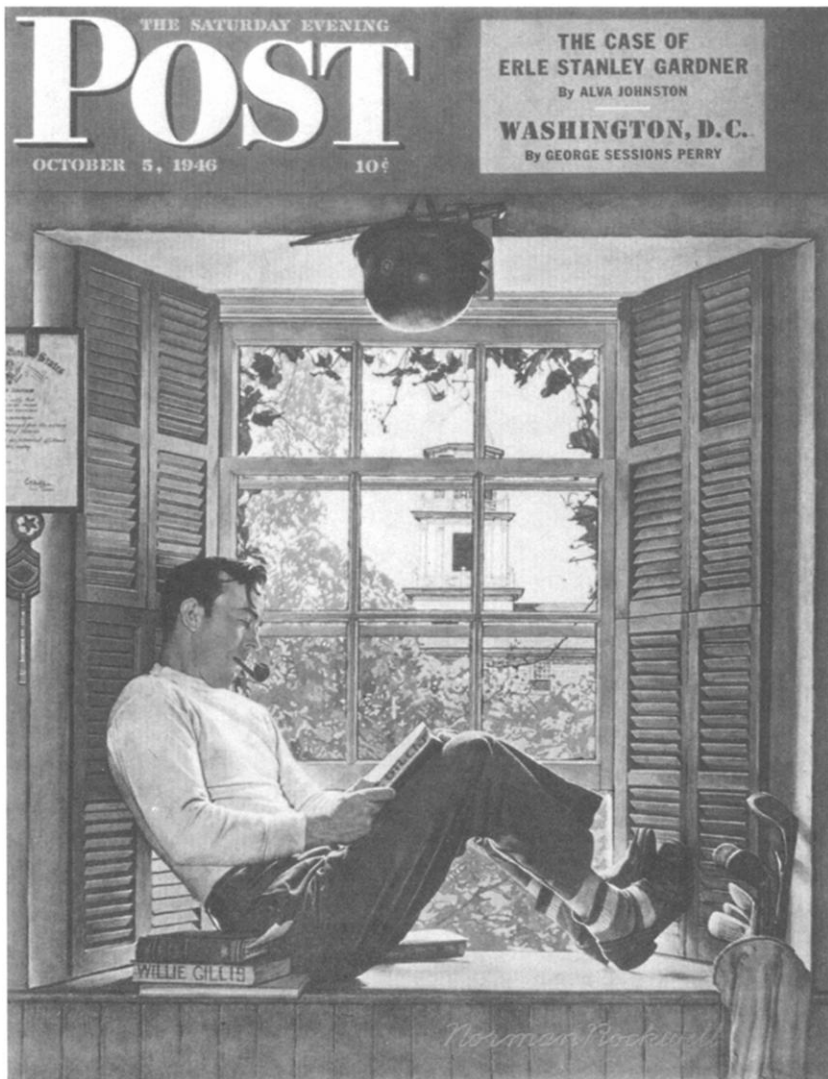


Plate 1. Willie Gillis had been the subject of several Rockwell paintings. He had always been portrayed as the average American kid. Now sergeant Willie smokes a pipe and plays golf in a traditional college setting. Christopher Finch, *Norman Rockwell's America* (New York, 1975). ©The Curtis Publishing Company.

that the GI Bill actually changed higher education very little beyond establishing a precedent for future expansion.³ In fact, GI Bill historian Keith Olson notes a Veterans Administration study that stated the likelihood that over 80 percent of the veterans would have gone to college anyway, the sheer backlog of traditional students having caused the bulge in enrollments.⁴ Nevertheless, Willie's transformation does reflect a profound and very real shift in American perceptions of the place of college education in American society that the GI Bill accelerated.

This refashioning of the perceived value of a college education occurred while Americans adjusted to a new era, one dominated by corporate organizations, a mass media, and an evolving consumer ethos.⁵ Imagine the implicit future of Willie and those like him after attending college—a house in suburbia, a secure job with a major corporation, and perhaps even two cars and a television. From an everyman-GI to a new inductee to the broadening American middle class, Willie reflects a new postwar American Dream that the GI Bill helped to fashion, and college education formed a vital component of this broadening conceptualization. Through an examination of the reactions to the GI Bill in the print media, this article seeks to explore not only how a college education increasingly became seemingly more accessible to average Americans—a possibility charged with new meaning, but also what this phenomenon reveals about the underlying cultural values informing this shift in the perception of college.⁶ The GI Bill indeed changed

opportunity, allowing many poor but deserving Americans to receive a college education. *Life* magazine's editors considered the GI Bill's influence so significant in sparking universal education that they placed it in their section dealing with the social revolutions resulting from post-war expansion.

³Keith Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington, 1974), 109-110; and Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco, 1977), 283-84.

⁴Olson, *The G.I. Bill*, 109-10. Elsewhere in the book Olson displayed statistics on the World War II GI Bill taken from the Veterans Administration records. The statistics show that substantially more veterans took on the job training (18%) or sub-college level educational courses (44%) than took advantage of college level training (29%). Olson, *The G. I. Bill*, 76.

⁵Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass Consumption Society," in Lary May, Ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War* (Chicago, 1989), 38-57. That the corporate "organization man" became a postwar icon in a new era of consumer-oriented, "outer-directed" behavior is well established by such studies as David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, 1950); and William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York, 1956).

⁶I chose to examine the most popular periodicals of the day, those with the widest readership and the most generic appeal. Such popular periodicals include *Saturday Evening Post*, *American Magazine*, *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Ladies Home Journal*. For the examination of women's issues, I added *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Seventeen* to the list. Popular professional periodicals like *Fortune*, *Business Week*, *School and Society*, *Journal of Higher Education*, and *American Scholar* also appear where appropriate to the discussion.

the way Americans thought of a college education, and these new perceptions dovetailed with and were an intimate aspect of emerging new conceptions of defining oneself in a corporate world and a consumer culture. Nevertheless, these new conceptions also contained traditional notions of the value of college, markers of social class, and gender prescriptions as well, that existed alongside but in contrast with the act's association with democratization.⁷ No historians have explored these deeper cultural ramifications involved with the GI Bill.⁸ The enormous impact of the GI Bill has been taken as a given. Consequently, I believe, we have not adequate-

For the late war and postwar years, up to 1950, I surveyed all editions of the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *American Magazine*, and *Ladies Home Journal* for relevant articles, advertisements, and short stories. For the interwar years, the years 1937-1939 received the most attention in the four forementioned magazines. General and volume indexes were used to locate articles, advertisements, and short stories that seemed of interest in the other periodicals mentioned.

I view the notion of going to college as a cultural construct as much as an economic one, a concept with its own set of associations subject to change in an American society whose culture was shifting to adapt to new imperatives. My assumptions regarding the relevance of the media or popular culture for constructing a historical conception of a period's values and ideals comes from a variety of sources. As Carl Kaestle states, readers act individually "to develop identities, choose allegiances, form beliefs, and conduct their day-to-day lives," but I believe that what they read, as well as their economic condition, provides certain sets of options or parameters. Carl Kaestle, "History of Readers," in Carl F. Kaestle, et. al., *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880* (New Haven, 1991), 50-51. I also agree with Stuart Hall's view of the function of the media as "the provision and selective construction of social knowledge, of social images, through which we perceive the 'worlds,' the 'lived realities,' of others, and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible . . . lived totality." Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect,'" in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Mass Communication and Society* (London, 1977), 325. I do not presume to speak for readers, but I do hope to reconstruct the elements of cultural change in how the media encouraged Americans to think of college education and themselves in line with the changing imperatives of a corporate and consumer world. My interpretive assumptions and methodological approach have also been particularly influenced by Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass Consumption Society," in Lary May, Ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, 1985); and Joan Shelley Rubin's argument that both modern and traditional cultural values were fused in middlebrow culture as the American middle class coped with the changes in society as discussed in *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1992). My interpretation of the impact of the GI Bill on American women differs little but adds new support for the prevailing historical interpretation voiced originally by Barbara Miller-Solomon, *In The Company of Educated Women: A History of Women in Higher Education in America* (New Haven, 1985); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Mixed Messages: Women and the Impact of World War II," *Southern Humanities Review* 27 (Summer 1993): 235-245; and Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940's* (Boston, 1982), 101-120.

⁸The few studies that exclusively examine the G.I. Bill are Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*; Davis R.B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* (New York, 1969); and Harold M. Hyman, *American Singularity: The 1787 Northwest Ordinance, the 1862 Homestead and Morrill Acts, and the 1944 G.I. Bill* (Athens, GA, 1986). Though usually quite good, these studies focused primarily on the legislative formation and administration of the bill. Broader works on American higher education in the Twentieth Century, such as John S. Brubacher and Willus Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities, 1636-1968* (New York, 1968); Oscar Handlin and

ly explored the most important result of the GI Bill—its function in reshaping the role of college education in postwar American culture.⁹

To fully appreciate the impact of the GI Bill in American culture, however, necessitates a brief examination of the prewar cultural dispositions toward college. Already by the interwar years higher education had begun to play a more prominent role in American life.¹⁰ Despite these remarkable transformations, however, America's colleges and universities remained the citadels of the upper-middle class.¹¹ In fact, most Americans, it seemed, retained a healthy skepticism or at least ambivalence toward higher education (see Plate 2). For instance, a 1937 *American Magazine* survey of employers found that 70 percent were not particularly concerned with college degrees, believing they guaranteed no useful abilities.¹² Indeed, Robert H. Jackson, Assistant U.S. Attorney General, spoke for many Americans in 1937 when he concluded that the colleges of the middle class were out of touch with the masses, sheltering youth from the "struggle of life," and making them both rigid of thought and timid.¹³ Like Jackson, many Americans still embraced the self-made, self-educated man as the cultural icon of America.

During the interwar years, then, colleges and universities occupied an increasingly important and visible place in American culture, while retaining an overwhelming association with the genteel elite. The images and characterizations emerging from the pages of the periodical literature of the 1930s exhibited these same tendencies. When college attendance entered into short story plots, the setting for the story or the associated characters

Mary F. Handlin, *The American College and American Culture: Socialization as a Function of Higher Education* (New York, 1970); and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York, 1987), take a quick look at the academic reaction to the G.I. Bill then move quickly to the more impressive episodes in democratization (both in terms of enrollments, curriculum, and federal funding) beginning in the late 1950s.

⁹Due to limits of time and space, this paper can only focus on mainstream, white American cultural aspects. I regret the necessity of excluding minority racial subculture's since I anticipate a fascinating contrast to the dominant white experience.

¹⁰By 1938 one million two hundred thousand students attended the nation's colleges and universities, compared with one hundred fifty thousand in 1890, truly a remarkable increase. Furthermore, during this period Americans began to associate a college degree with economic mobility in an enlarging corporate world. David O. Levine, *American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca, 1986), 13-14.

¹¹Levine, *American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 119.

¹²"Are College Men Preferred," *American Magazine* 124 (September 1937): 96.

¹³Robert H. Jackson, "Why a College Education," *Vital Speeches* 4 (15 December 1937): 157-8. Two other typical articles are M. K. Wisheart, "How Colleges Rob Men of Priceless Years," *American Magazine* 109 (February 1930): 36-37, 134-35; and Lawrence T. Manion, "Too Many Years in School?" *School and Society* 49 (February 1939): 150. Another article noted that "college-bred sometimes refers to something that requires a fearful amount of dough, is seldom self-supporting, and usually proves to be nothing more than a four year loaf." Curtis Wilgus, "Some Comments on University Students and Studies," *School and Society* 49 (March 1939): 318.

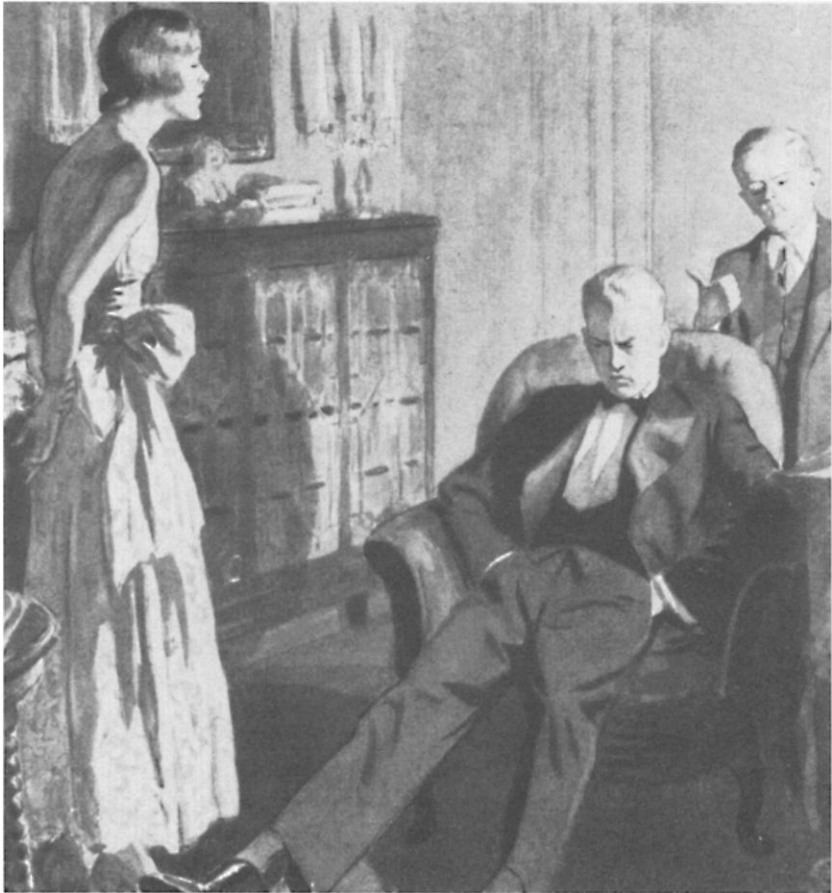


Plate 2. This illustration appeared in an article arguing against the increasing trend of college enrollments. The illustration in such an article perfectly captures the prewar attitudes toward college, since the author advises against college attendance and the family pictured in the illustration is decidedly upper-middle class. M. K. Wisheart, "Which College—If Any?" *American Magazine* 110 (September 1930): 21-23. Illustration by Joseph Simont.

assumed an elite, upper-class representation. For instance, an *American Magazine* short story set in a college fraternity described the principal character as a “son of Plymouth-Rock-Landers.”¹⁴ More significant than the story lines, the illustrations accompanying such articles also consistently presented the characters as elite. College characters were consistently portrayed as well-attired with an aristocratic “air” and carriage.¹⁵ Whenever the story contained college imagery in the plot or illustrations, the public likely understood that such characters were members of a privileged class.¹⁶

Advertisements also offer a glimpse at the images that reflected and informed popular perceptions of higher education. Insurance company advertisers variously utilized college imagery to play on parents’ middle-class self-perceptions, aspirations, or fears.¹⁷ Insurance ads portrayed those who could afford to contemplate college as decidedly upper-middle class.¹⁸ Insurance companies were not alone, however. Watch companies including Gruen and Elgin inevitably advertised their products as the ultimate

¹⁴Albert Treynor, “I Got Two Sweeties,” *American Magazine* 125 (February 1938): 48-52, 90. Other short stories where college references coincided with affluence are Horatio Winslow, “Birds, Bees, and Bill,” *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (1 January 1938): 12-13, 45-48; Ann Morse, “Who Learned Too Young,” *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (19 February 1938): 10-11, 56-61; Brooke Hanlon, “Whom The Gods Love,” *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (7 May 1938): 12-13, 118-21; Ellin Berlin, “To Them That Have,” *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (14 May 1938): 10-11, 53-59; Earl Reed Silvers, “Small Though They Be,” *American Magazine* 125 (August 1938): 34-37, 66-70; Edward Hope, “Marry in Haste,” *American Magazine* 125 (August 1938): 52-56, 128-131; and Herbert Dalmas, “Off Stage,” *American Magazine* 125 (April 1938): 48-50, 123-27.

¹⁵Berlin, “To Them That Have,” 10-11. Illustration by William C. Houple. Another story entitled “Who Learned Too Young” in *Saturday Evening Post* focused on the lives of elite Bostonian WASPS, one of whom attended Yale and was set to take over the family business. Morse, “Who Learned Too Young,” 10-11. In the aforementioned *American Magazine* article, for instance, fraternity members appeared well-dressed in tuxedos for a dance. Treynor, “I Got Two Sweeties,” 48-49. Illustration by Emerton Heitland. Another *American Magazine* article involving a fraternity also contained illustrations of well-heeled students. Dalmas, “Off Stage,” 48-49. Illustration by Floyd Davis.

¹⁶Even a 1930 *American Magazine* article arguing against the tendency toward increased enrollments, illustrated the family of a boy who did not want to attend college in a decidedly elite fashion. M. K. Wisehart, “Which College—If Any?” *American Magazine* 110 (September 1930): 21-23. Illustration by Joseph Simont, 22-23.

¹⁷One advertisement pictured a boy in overalls eating lunch in an auto shop, staring longingly into space while a book lies open on the table. The caption read, “This lad was going to be a doctor,” playing upon the distinction between those who go to college and the laboring classes. Union Central Life Insurance Company advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (8 January 1938): 41.

¹⁸An Investors Syndicate advertisement captured both these sentiments. The half-page ad pictured a man in the yard helping his young son align a golf club while the caption read “My boy will have every advantage—but will he?” The advantage referred specifically to a college education, the ad noting that the father already had a school picked out. By virtue of the golf clubs, clothing, and collegiate expectations, this ad suggested middle-class security and values. Investors Syndicate advertisement, *American Magazine* 125 (April 1938) 117. Another example is Metropolitan Life Insurance Company advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (April 1938): 61.

graduation gift. When such ads involved college matriculation in their themes, they naturally implied associations with privilege and sophistication. For instance, one Elgin ad featured a picture of beautiful Gwendolyn Wilder (Wellesley Class of '38) lounging in a gold party dress.¹⁹ Arrow shirts also occasionally combined collegiate images and upper-middle-class style. One Arrow shirt ad presented a full-page drawing of college men in a team pose all dressed in white shirts and ties with the caption: "You can join the best dressed fraternity for \$2."²⁰ All such ads connected college with a certain upper-middle-class sophistication.

Aside from the watch ads, however, the vast majority of the advertisements that used college images focused solely on men. Insurance ads, for example, mentioned education for the children generally, but every insurance advertisement that pictured a hopeful parent gazing at a child featured a boy.²¹ Furthermore, although several short stories contained female characters of the upper-middle class associating with male characters who had attended college, the author never bothered to disclose whether or not the female had attended college.²² Other stories that noted a woman's past college attendance involved elite characters, and the college experience seemed to be regarded simply as a right of passage devoid of any other meaning.

Clearly, when college entered into an advertisement or story as a theme, the dominant images and associations directed popular attitudes toward a connection between college-going and the upper-middle class. Nevertheless, although such images and characterizations pepper the periodical literature of the period, so that the flavor of collegiate references was unmistakably elite and sophisticated, collegiate references in stories and ads

¹⁹Elgin Watch advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (21 May 1938): 58.

²⁰Arrow advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 211 (27 August 1934): 52. Another full-page Arrow ad featured a drawing of well-dressed men (white shirts and ties) playing baseball in a tropical locale. The caption asks: "What style of shirt is it that's rated number one by you and me and all the lucky fellows now enjoying winter vacations? . . . That's top choice in the college man's wardrobe? . . . That's first choice of American Businessmen?" Arrow advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (22 January 1938): 47.

²¹One insurance advertisement for National Committee for Life Insurance Education pictured a female student in cap and gown. *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (14 May 1938): 34-35. Nevertheless, U.S. Savings Bonds advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (5 March 1938): 63; Investors Syndicate, *American Magazine*, 117; and Chevrolet advertisement, *American Magazine* 125 (May 1938): 79, for instance all pictured boys in their ads when referring to educational aspirations.

²²Short stories that mentioned male college attendance but failed to note a female's education were R. C. Kirk, "Ladies Go Last," *American Magazine* 125 (June 1938): 44-47, 136-38; Winslow, "Birds, Bees, and Bill," Morse, "Who Learned Too Young," and Hanlon, "Whom The Gods Love." In 1938 only two short stories surfaced that depicted a female college graduate in an active career. Blaine Miller, "Heaven to Earth," *American Magazine* 125 (June 1938): 11-13, 70-74, contains a lead female character who is a journalist. Phyllis Duzanne, "Robin Hill," *American Magazine* 125 (July 1938) 22-26, 84-88, casts the main female character as a college graduate and teacher.

generally were not overly abundant. In fact, aspects of the culture's overall ambivalence toward the benefits of higher education also surfaced.²³ Many insurance ads failed to specifically mention college as an educational goal.²⁴ Two ads that employed images of a boy leaving home made no reference to college. Rather, the boys were seeking their fortunes in the business world.²⁵ Too many Americans still regarded formal education skeptically. College-going was associated with the consumption of the upper-middle class, something aspired to by some but often resented or dismissed as frivolous by many if not most Americans during the 1930s.

Considering this prewar popular ambivalence toward higher education, the failure of the educational benefits of the GI Bill to ignite immediate public or media interest should not be considered surprising. It is well known that almost no one involved with the formulation or passage of the GI Bill envisioned the educational portion as an action aimed at facilitating mass social mobility or overhauling the educational system.²⁶ Fearing a mass of unemployed veterans, the educational incentives were to function primarily as another form of unemployment relief.²⁷ During and immediately following the war, most articles on the GI Bill focused on the fifty-two weeks of unemployment benefits, vocational re-training, or the home, farm, and business loans rather than educational benefits.²⁸

²³For instance, when stories dealt with "lower class" characters, the difference in descriptions and treatments was striking. Elizabeth Troy, "The Plumber in the Parlor," *American Magazine* 125 (May 1938): 24-27; and Maxine McBride, "Drive Slowly in Eden," *American Magazine* 125 (April 1938): 40-42, 79-81, drew sharp contrasts between the working-class and upper-middle-class characters.

²⁴For example, Banks Life Company advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (1 January 1938): 47; United States Savings Bonds advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (8 January 1938): 33; National Committee for Life Insurance Education advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (14 May 1938): 34-35, all mention education or school expenses with no specific reference to college. Usually education is included as only one of many worries.

²⁵National Life Insurance Company advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (7 May 1938): 76; and Parke Davis and Company advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 210 (16 April 1938): 65.

²⁶In fact, the bill received substantial opposition from many educators fearful of federal encroachments and a sullied academic environment. For instance, James B. Conant of Harvard University spoke out against the indiscriminate eligibility requirements and worried that colleges would be swamped with misfits. "President Conant Urges a Revision of the GI Bill of Rights," *School and Society* 61 (10 February 1945): 56.

²⁷Olson states, "at its roots, The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 was more an anti-depression measure than an expression of gratitude to veterans. . . . Anxiety over economics preceded and dominated altruism toward veterans." Olson, *The G.I. Bill*, 24.

²⁸"FDR's Demobilization Plans Catch His Opponents Offguard," *Newsweek* 22 (9 August 1943): 36; "Dough for Joe," *Newsweek* 24 (3 July 1945): 34-35; "When You Come Back," *Life* 17 (25 September 1944): 53, all emphasized the unemployment benefits as the most significant part of the GI Bill, even ranking education behind the loan packages. Even articles that criticized the GI Bill, such as Henry F. Pringle, "Are We Making a Bum Out of GI Joe?" *Ladies Home Journal* 63 (September 1946): 48; and "The Veteran Not Only Wants an Opportunity, He Is One," *Saturday Evening Post* 218 (17 March 1945): 136, focused almost completely on the unemployment benefits.

In accounting for this paucity of interest, historian Keith Olson has argued that Americans “lacked a coherent image of the student veteran.”²⁹ GI Joe was an average American, and as prewar media images revealed, average Americans did not go to college. Books like Dixon Wector’s *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (1944) emphasized that Johnny primarily wanted a job.³⁰ Articles on the returning veteran discussed his readjustment to civilian life based on prewar realities.³¹ In fact, the majority of opinions voiced on the educational benefits assumed a negative tone. Stanley Frank’s, “The GI’s Reject Education,” encapsulated the prevailing GI and public attitude toward education. Frank noted ironically that the GI Bill “is a splendid bill, a wonderful bill, with only one conspicuous drawback . . . the guys aren’t[sic] buying it.” After interviewing numerous veterans returning from Europe, Frank concluded that “they say ‘education’ means ‘books,’ anyway you slice it, and that’s for somebody else.” Veterans impatiently wanted “a quick return to the normal life they knew, and education had an insignificant place, if any, in the pattern they were trying to achieve.” “Pushing a pencil isn’t for me,” one private commented, “that’s the junk they teach you in school.” Frank commented that such veterans’ opinions prevailed despite the military’s attempts at promotion and, like many others, he characterized the educational provisions of the GI Bill as a colossal waste of money.³² Like most Americans in prewar years, GI’s remained skeptical of the benefits of an education unless it paid dividends or was somehow practical. A conceptual gulf still separated the common man from the college man with the latter’s connections to upper-middle-class society and culture.

Nevertheless, once the massive backlog of veterans did begin descending upon colleges and universities en masse in 1946-47, media attention and the public’s imagination became infatuated with the GI Bill phenomenon. It is important to remember that the vast majority of the GIs attending college probably would have gone regardless of the GI Bill.³³ Yet, the GI was identified as an average American during the war and, thus, articles on GI attendance in colleges revelled in the novelty of the common, veteran-everyman attending elite institutions. Indeed, media coverage of college veter-

²⁹Olson, *The G.I. Bill*, 28.

³⁰Dixon Wector, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944).

³¹For instance, Charles Stevenson “What Is Happening to the Veterans Who Come Home,” *Reader’s Digest* 45 (July 1944): 79-82, mentions college or vocational training at the end of the article, but the main focus was on informing veterans and their families about how the law provided for them to obtain their old jobs. Brig. General Leon W. Johnson, “Don’t Let the Veteran Down,” *Saturday Evening Post* 219 (10 August 1946): 12-13; and Charles Bolte, “When Joe Is Out of Uniform,” *New York Times Magazine*, 1 July 1945, 10-11, both emphasized that what the veteran needed most was a job.

³²Stanley Frank, “The GI’s Reject Education,” *Saturday Evening Post* 218 (18 August 1945): 20, 101-102.

³³Olson, *The G.I. Bill*, 109-110.

ans storming the ivory tower accelerated the process of fundamentally altering the cultural perceptions of who should go to college and what should be studied there.

Nowhere did the GI retain his distinct identity—nowhere did his presence clash with prevailing identifications—more than at the nation's colleges and universities. The contrasts proved delightfully novel and made for great stories. In "The Two Joes Meet—Joe College, Joe Veteran," Edith Efron captured some of the appealing contrasts. The Lehigh "Joe Colleges" quoted in her article had grown frustrated by "Joe Veteran's" lack of enthusiasm for college traditions. Besides the increasing veteran competition for females, veterans refused to wear the traditional brown tie, socks, and cap of a freshman. Mature veteran fraternity pledges refused to light the cigarettes of the much younger upperclassmen as tradition dictated.³⁴

Numerous articles highlighted the cramped living conditions. Such articles typically offered pictures that contrasted the veteran-everyman walking the regal grounds of a college campus accompanied by his wife and baby.³⁵ One article's opening seemed to relish in "the revolution . . . at Old Ivory Tower and Old Siwash," as "the old wishing oak is hidden by a trailer settlement," and children's diapers hung from the maples.³⁶ Every major magazine examined for this study ran a feature story on the veteran at college, and they all highlighted the novelty of the veteran-everyman in an elite environment. "Yanks at Yale" and "GIs at Harvard" pointedly addressed the veteran's refreshing, democratic intrusion upon old aristocratic institutions—the invading GIs seeming to conquer another alien domain.³⁷

That the veterans succeeded in their studies made such stories even better and challenged prewar assumptions of who could benefit from a college education.³⁸ But, the impact of the veterans extended far beyond effect-

³⁴Edith Efron, "The Two Joes Meet—Joe College, Joe Veteran," *New York Times Magazine*, 16 June 1946, 21. Troubles with fraternities received frequent attention in the articles reporting how combat-tough veterans balked at the hazing demands of non-veteran brothers. For instance, "Veterans On The Campus," *Time*, 28 August 1944, 56-8; and "Boom on Fraternity Row," *Time*, 9 February 1948, 75, commented upon the flare-ups.

³⁵Some excellent pictures may be found in "Veterans at College," *Life* 20 (7 January 1946): 37-42; "Veterans at College," *Life* 22 (21 April 1947): 105-113; and John Morris, "Married Veterans Take Over the Campus." Articles highlighting the veteran on campus include C. S. Forester, "Meet a Student Veteran," *Ladies Home Journal* 62 (May 1945): 137-40; "Pop Goes to College," *Newsweek* 26 (26 November 1945): 104-106; John Morris, "Married Veterans Take Over the Campus," *Ladies Home Journal* 63 (October 1946): 32-39; "Veterans at College," *Life* 20 (7 January 1946): 37-42; "Veterans at College," *Life* 22 (21 April 1947): 105-113; and Milton Mackage, "Crisis at the Colleges," *Saturday Evening Post* 219 (3 August 1946): 9-10.

³⁶Mackage, "Crisis at the Colleges," 9-10.

³⁷Vance Packard, "Yanks at Yale," *American Magazine* 139 (April 1945): 46-47; and Charles J. V. Murphy "GIs at Harvard," *Life* 20 (17 June 1946): 16-22.

³⁸For example, at Cornell University the veterans' cumulative grade average exceeded the non-veteran, traditional students. "Academic Achievements of Veterans at Cornell University," *School and Society* 65 (February 1947): 101-102. The veteran's academic performance

ing a reassessment of who should go to college. Having gained the media spotlight, the image of the GI student as a veteran-everyman gave their critique of higher education substantial force as the voice of the average American.³⁹ A 1947 *Newsweek* article reporting on a study of college veterans echoed many common themes. Feeling as though the war had delayed their start in life, veterans demanded streamlined education, similar to what they had become accustomed to during the war. They thought that all courses, but especially those in the humanities, should be geared to real life or national and international issues. Most significantly, however, veterans everywhere demanded practicality. The author stated that veterans “are eager for specific training,” resenting required courses on the “Minor Poems of Milton.” They believed “that the main duty of the university should be to train him for adult participation in the modern world,” and that they wanted more courses like radio-technology, business administration, economics, and engineering.⁴⁰ Like nearly every article on the subject, a *Fortune* article on the class of '49 not only proclaimed that year's veteran-dominated class the best ever, but also emphasized the veterans' demand that college be the vehicle to a secure job in a large corporation.⁴¹

received praise from all quarters, even from erstwhile critics like president James B. Conant of Harvard. Olson, *The G.I. Bill*, 49. A limited list of articles trumpeting the GI's academic performance include George A. MacFarland, “Veterans at the University of Pennsylvania,” *Educational Outlook* 22 (November 1947): 18; Curtis E. Avery, “Veterans' Education in the Universities,” *Journal of Higher Education* 17 (October 1946): 360; “The Class of '49,” *Fortune* 39 (June 1949): 84-86; Benjamin Fine, “Veterans Raise College Standards,” *Educational Outlook* 22 (November 1947): 58; and Harold W. Stooke, “The Veterans Educate the Nation,” *American Association of Colleges Bulletin* 33 (October 1947): 469. Of course the success of war time courses like the Navy V-12 as well as the GI Bill had a profound impact on the future direction of higher education through such forums as the President's Commission on Higher Education and its published report. Gail Kennedy, Ed., *Education for Democracy: The Debate over the Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education* (Boston, 1952).

³⁹Articles by veterans in college reflecting on the G.I. Bill, argued that the G.I. Bill set a precedent, an entering wedge that must be exploited in order to “open new opportunities of social welfare . . . [and satisfy] America's need for educated citizens.” John Higham, “Subsidy or Sympathy?” *American Scholar* 16 (July 1947): 343. Two veterans writing in that same forum, noting veterans' preferences for practical courses, urged that the liberal arts courses be integrated into the study of modern problems—“ethics type courses that integrate increased specialization preferences with what role they are expected to play in society.” M.T. Cooke, Jr., “The Need for Direction and Meaning,” *American Scholar* 16 (July 1947), 345; and Keith Spalding, “The Contemporary Context,” *American Scholar* 16 (July 1947), 346. Looking to the future, scholars echoed such arguments in vast numbers of articles; two typical articles are Harry James Carman, “Education and the World of Tomorrow,” *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* 31 (October 1945): 400-12; and Argus Tresidder, “The Illiberal Arts: A Summary of Many Options,” *Journal of Higher Education* 17 (March 1946): 125-30.

⁴⁰S. M. Vinocour, “The Veteran and College,” *Newsweek* 30 (10 November 1947): 80.

⁴¹“The Class of '49,” *Fortune*, 84-86. Efron, “The Two Joes Meet;” Murphy, “GIs at Harvard;” and “Veterans on the Campus” all comment on veterans' demands for practicality and relevance in all courses. “Out of College,” *Life* 28 (12 June 1950): 32, is a typical editorial from the period lamenting how graduates (presumably including the many veterans) only desired the economic security afforded by the major corporations.

In many ways the impact of the successful college veteran drastically altered the traditional perceptions of the nature of the college experience, guiding the curriculum even more than in prewar years towards more practical and vocational applications. Due to these democratizing influences and the impressive attention they received, college appeared to be more accessible in the public imagination. For example, by making higher education seem both more practical and more open, coverage of the GI Bill prompted some veterans to contact Harvard regarding that school's plumbing curriculum.⁴² The presence of the veteran-everyman at typically elite institutions seemed to translate the college experience into more comprehensible conceptual terms, indeed, to democratize the image of higher education to a certain degree. The veterans blazed the path for others to follow, seeming to remake American colleges to fit the practical needs of its citizens in a new corporate world.⁴³

The same media images and messages which celebrated the common, veteran-everyman and his influence in changing "aristocratic" institutions could also be interpreted in the reverse direction, however. They also communicated, either directly or indirectly, how the veteran-everyman partook of and became identified with a higher social class. They transmitted the opening and viability of a new avenue to raise oneself and one's family, allowing for the possibility for mass changes in cultural self-perception. The common man had invaded the aristocratic campuses, not only changing the colleges, but also raising his own status by association and offering a model for emulation.

College images and settings commonly associated with privilege and exclusiveness pervaded the articles on the veterans. Those articles may have showed the veterans' cramped accommodations as a symbol of democratic opportunity on the campus, but equally abundant—usually in the very same articles—were pictures of the veteran or his family on a tree-lined quad or posed against gothic buildings. *Life* featured two pictorial stories on the veterans in college in 1946 and 1947 filled with images such as a husband and wife strolling across the beautiful (and elite) Williams College campus. *American Magazine's* pictorial story "Yanks at Yale" chronicled vets rubbing elbows with the elite.

⁴² Murphy, "GIs at Harvard," 20.

⁴³It should be noted that although such critiques appeared to be the voice of average Americans demanding change in higher education, the complaining veterans, for the most part, were simply more mature traditional students. The seeming democratic critique of colleges and universities was mainly a product of the intersection of the popular image of the GI with the popular image of colleges and universities. In one sense the veteran students were not traditional. War had aged them, and their critiques were real. But they did not represent a new class invading higher education except through their popular image as veteran everymen—Bill Mauldin's Willie and Joe going to college.

Typical of the GI Bill genre of articles, a *Life* exposé on the Class of 1948 highlighted the veteran-everyman at Cornell and offered the public numerous images of these students as full participants in traditional, upper-middle-class college life. The first two pages pictured well-dressed seniors engaged in a classic college “bull session,” standing or sitting around the venerable dormitory fireplace discussing their abundant job prospects. The article described (and pictured) one veteran-everyman, Doug Foote, enjoying a fraternity beer party. The author noted that Doug’s low golf score corresponded to his GPA yet he was hired by a major corporation. Other pictures in that article included panoramic vistas of Cornell’s ivy-covered gothic buildings and picturesque campus.⁴⁴ Such pictures of the veteran immersed in the traditional campus atmosphere probably reflected reality better than the more novel images of the veteran campus rebel, even though the latter made for a better story. The veteran-everyman in a romanticized picture of college life provided the average American with an accessible vision of social, economic, and cultural mobility.

Strong evidence revealing a subtle alteration in the perceptions of who fit into the college environment emerges in periodical short stories. Most prewar short story authors had used college association to indicate upper-middle class or privileged status. In contrast, most authors in the postwar years incorporated the veteran into their references to educational aspirations and college. “The Education of Eugene Miley” (1946) in *Ladies Home Journal*, for example, reflected the influence of the changes wrought by the GI Bill. An Army Ranger, Miley had lived a hard life during the Depression and had only passed the eighth grade. After losing his leg at Anzio, he was sent stateside where he fell in love with his nurse, a graduate of the University of Georgia. Acutely conscious of his lack of education, he dedicated himself to the special accelerated program of a high school for veterans. He attempted to qualify for the University of Pennsylvania, noting with pride how “ex-bricklayer’s apprentice Eugene Miley was taking college entrance exams.” Of course, in the end he qualified. That story seems to function almost as an advertisement for the GI Bill, but undoubtedly the story signalled the acknowledgement of a promising new avenue to social and cultural self-improvement.⁴⁵

⁴⁴“Class of ’48,” *Life*, 7 June 1948, 111-119.

⁴⁵Bill Davidson, “The Education of Eugene Miley,” *Ladies Home Journal* 63 (February 1946) 52-54, 114-16. Less forceful in its championing of the GI Bill’s educational benefits but no less revealing, a 1948 short story in the *Saturday Evening Post* entitled “The Right Girl” took place entirely within the setting of a GI campus “vetsville”. The story opens with the meeting of two ex-servicemen, both previously of low rank, enrolling in a university. Love and the trials of veteran readjustment to peaceful civilian living form the central issues of the story. The main character, Johnny O’Connor, is a tough guy with a shady gangster background suffering from recurrent combat flashbacks, who enrolls to attain gentlemanly qualities at the behest of his father. The very fact that the cast of characters and setting combined

Changing marketing strategies among advertisers provide even more powerful indications of the impact of the GI Bill on the stock of collective cultural images associated with college. During the late 1940s, and especially after 1947, more and more companies used college themes to promote their products. A Listerine ad shows a professor in cap and gown slipping a bottle of Listerine along with a diploma to a college graduate for him to “get a toe-hold in business.”⁴⁶ Zippo and Ronson lighters presented their products as great gifts for graduating college students.⁴⁷ At the same time, products that had advertised upper-class, collegiate connections during the prewar years enhanced their associations with affluence and privilege. A full-page 1947 Gruen watch ad matches a stereotypical cartoon illustration of graduating students with the style of watch that best suited their fictional characters. For example, “President Jones” sported a “Yale” watch, and “Handsome Abbott” a “Harvard” model.⁴⁸

Although watch ads (among others) enhanced their association with elite collegiate images and many products not typically connected with college, like Listerine, used college themes, clothing ads underwent the most remarkable transformation. Even as late as the fall of 1946, most apparel ads contained few discernable references to college themes.⁴⁹ In 1947 and

associations between the everyman-veteran and college confirmed the widespread influence of the GI Bill on the common stock of prewar cultural perceptions, creating new sets of possibilities. The characters still connected the college experience with privilege and the attainment of sophistication. C. F. Scoggins, “The Right Girl,” *Saturday Evening Post* 220 (17 April 1948): 18-19, 116-119.

⁴⁶Listerine Antiseptic advertisement, *Life* 22 (2 June 1947): 77. Colgate Dental Cream also utilized a college theme. One of their ads featured a series of pictures and captions (comic-book style). The graduate in cap and gown ponders why he lost the girl when he was voted “most likely to succeed.” of course his dentist gives him Colgate. *Life* 26 (30 May 1949): 10.

⁴⁷Zippo advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (18 September 1948): 161; Ronson advertisement, *Life* 28 (15 May 1950): 114. Greyhound Busses and Pullman Sleeping Cars both advertised their services in ads aimed specifically at college students returning to school in the Fall. Greyhound Bus advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (25 September 1948): 129; and Pullman Sleeping Car advertisement, *Life* 29 (18 September 1950): 31. In contrast, a Greyhound advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 219 (28 September 1946): 112, did not incorporate a college theme.

⁴⁸Gruen advertisement, *Life* 22 (12 May 1947) 30. Elgin advertisement with Mount Holyoke woman, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (14 May 1949): back of front cover; Elgin advertisement with MIT man, *Life* 26 (23 May 1949): 23. A 1947 Hamilton watch ad offered a color illustration of five attractive campus leaders from “best athlete” to “campus queen” and “best student.” Their fictional biographical sketches predicted executive success or confirmed their popularity while matching them with a particular Hamilton style. Hamilton watch advertisement, *Life* 22 (5 May 1947): 127. The study depicted as the setting for one ad implied wealth and privilege. Watchmakers of Switzerland advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (4 September 1948): 24. Another typical ad reinforcing collegiate identifications was a Parker Pen advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (11 September 1948): back of front cover.

⁴⁹For instance, whereas one year later Arrow was one of the most aggressive in utilizing college themes during the Fall season, their ad in *Time*, 25 August 1947, 36, did not use college as a subject. The same holds true for Botany, *Saturday Evening Post* 219 (28 September 1946): 162.

especially 1948, their numbers exploded. A 1948 Hagggar slacks ad displayed a drawing of a college graduate (mortarboard on head) in shirt and tie with the familiar symbol of college, a gothic tower, in the background (see Plate 3).⁵⁰ Similarly, both Nelson-Paige shirt ads and Botany apparel ads incorporated collegiate men and the familiar gothic college architecture or quad settings into their ad art (see Plate 4).⁵¹ An impressive Wilson Brothers ad in color and spread over two pages, depicted two handsome roommates dressing in their tweed and plaid coats as they noticed a girl smiling favorably at them through their window overlooking the college quad (see Plate 5).⁵²

The sudden proliferation of college references and themes in a wide variety of products illustrates how the GI Bill phenomenon acted to change the image of higher education in American culture. Advertisers likely increased the number of products associated with college attendance out of a desire to cash in on the unprecedented expansion of the college market after 1946. But consider the messages encoded within these advertisements. Like the publicity surrounding the GI Bill, such advertisements seemed to democratize the image of higher education. Consumer products such as Listerine had never been associated with such elite environments prior to the war. The use of collegiate settings in an enlarged array of products reflects the increased currency of such images among the American public and encouraged more Americans to associate themselves with the colleges of the middle class. It must be emphasized, however, that the advertising images that both reflected and helped reinforce the new democratized conceptions of college also remained decidedly elite in their representations of college life. Advertisers invited a broader segment of the population to identify themselves circulating within elite, sophisticated, collegiate surroundings, and also to indulge in the consumer values and tastes of the privileged classes.


Similar to the changes in advertising, an alteration in the media coverage of colleges in general may also be detected in the years following the

⁵⁰Hagggar advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (14 May 1948): 142.

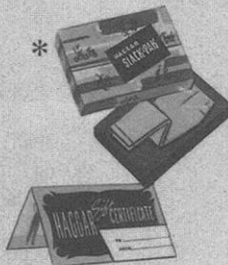
⁵¹Nelson-Paige advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (11 September 1948): 174. Botany advertisements on opposing pages, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (11 September 1948): 140-141; and Botany advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (18 September 1948): 46.

⁵²Wilson Brothers advertisement split over two pages, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (14 August 1948): 80-81. An Arrow ad playing on both college and football themes featured a half-page illustration of a handsome, well-dressed young man in a pressbox, silhouetted by the vibrant stadium on game day. The caption began, "college men (and other smart dressers) . . ." encouraging readers to identify with this elite image of college style. Arrow advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (11 September 1948): 65. Arrow had used collegiate references in the 1930s, but significantly enhanced them in the late 1940s. Arrow advertisement, *Time*, 25 August 1947, 36. Arrow advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (28 August 1948): 62. Other apparel ads incorporating the college theme are Essley, *Saturday Evening Post*, 221 (18 September 1948): 84; Interwoven Socks, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (28 August 1948): 6; and Kroy Processors, *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (28 August 1948).

142 THE SATURDAY




Voted
most
likely
to
succeed
in
pleasing
the
Grads



HAGGAR SLACKS

Here's an easy-to-buy*—sure-to-please gift for the graduate. Every man always wants another pair of slacks... especially if they are *Haggar Slacks*.

Young men, with a sharp eye for good looks like Haggar's easy hang and smooth drape. Expertly tailored from the pick of America's finest fabrics, Haggar Slacks fit better... look better... offer topmost value.



* Give Him a Haggar Slack-Pak with Gift Certificate... and let him choose his own.
From about
\$5.95 to \$14.95

HAGGAR COMPANY • DALLAS, TEXAS

Plate 3. Haggar advertisement. *Saturday Evening Post* 211 (August 27, 1934): 52. Courtesy of Haggar Clothing Co.

46 THE SATURDAY

'Botany' BRAND 500

Look For This Label

BOTANY 500
MILLS INC. PASSAIC N. J.

Tailored by Daroff

These suits and topcoats are the result of the combined efforts of two great manufacturers. Botany weaves the magnificent fabric which is the soul of the clothing. Expert Daroff tailoring completes America's top clothing value. Suits and topcoats...\$60

The Fabric is the Soul of the Suit

FABRIC BY
BOTANY MILLS INC. PASSAIC N. J.
TAILORED BY
DAROFF · PHILADELPHIA

®"BOTANY" IS A TRADEMARK OF BOTANY MILLS INC. PASSAIC, N. J.
REG. IN U. S. PAT. OFF. COPYRIGHT 1948, BOTANY MILLS, INC.

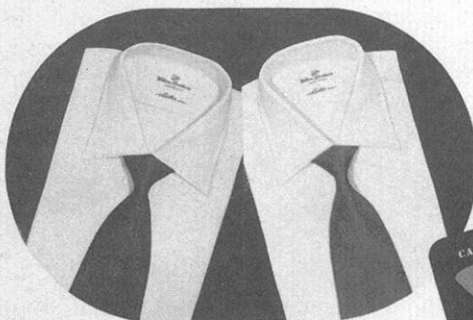
Plate 4. Notice the familiar gothic tower in the background. Botany advertisement. *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (September 18, 1948): 46.



THE COLLEGE MAN KNOWS

THE CORRECT APPROACH

...that Wilson Brothers is an all-star line from one end to the other. For instance, here's the shirt value of the season. The good-looking collar and trim-tapered waist show Wilson Brothers tailoring skill. The fabric is Bates smooth, lustrous white broadcloth. Two great names — one great shirt. See it at your Wilson Brothers dealer's today.



Look for the Bates label the sure sign of a fine shirt. Bates broadcloth is all-cotton, Sanforized, durable and Bates sells this superior shirting exclusively to the shirtmakers like Wilson who handle it with the tailoring skill it deserves.

BATES LABORATORY TESTED



FOR YOUNG MEN OF ALL AGES

Shirts • Foulless Neckties • Skipper Sportswear • Sweaters • Super Shorts
Wilest Ties • Buffer Socks • T-Shirts • Knit Underwear • Handkerchiefs • Gloves



BATES FABRICS, INC., 80 WORTH STREET, NEW YORK 13

Plate 5. Wilson Brothers advertisement. *Saturday Evening Post* 221 (August 14, 1948): 80-81.

public's exposure to veterans at college. As with advertising, the media seemed both to tap into and to encourage a new set of associations within the public imagination. As a whole, media coverage of college life generally, and the prospects of college graduates in particular, increased substantially in the late 1940s and continued to climb in subsequent years as the popularity of college-going grew.⁵³ Americans continued to find traditional elite images and associations enmeshed within the mushrooming number of postwar media presentations of college as a more democratically open and economically practical opportunity. Such articles typically accentuated the traditional, more privileged, and refined aspects of college life.⁵⁴ For instance, *Time* carried an article on veteran participation in traditional college fraternity pranks at elite Eastern schools in 1946.⁵⁵ *Life* ran numerous articles revealing the attractive, finer side of the college experience (rowing events and dances, for instance) at Yale and Syracuse.⁵⁶

Indicative of this increased media and public infatuation with college life, in 1949 *Life* magazine featured an article on the educational contrasts

⁵³Public infatuation with college graduates remained despite the veteran's departure. The veterans had linked college to corporate jobs and that connection solidified and became a source of concern during the 1950s as a skilled manpower shortage worried American analysts. As the 1950s progress, then, articles on the prospects for college graduates began to resemble promotional propaganda for the colleges. Each article not only trumpeted the incredible demand for college educated men, their starting salaries seemingly advertised higher education as the easy road to the American Dream. This promotional quality may be felt simply by reading the titles of articles which heralded economic opportunity. The content of such articles assumed a familiar pattern. Graduates received multiple job offers, as many as twenty-five reported in one article, from the best and largest corporations in the United States—IBM, AT&T, GE, and GM. Vance Packard, "Youngsters Wanted For Jobs Unlimited," *American Magazine* 155 (June 1953): 144; Jamie Wallace, "Wanted young Men for Top-Salary Jobs," *American Magazine* 157 (June 1954): 14-15; "Big Grab for Graduates," *Newsweek* 47 (18 June 1956): 93; "\$100 A Week Is Common for the Class of '57," *U.S. News and World Report* 42 (17 May 1957): 45-46.

⁵⁴Every term or image has multiple meanings. Defined in this way nearly any mention of college or jobs, or any pictures of campuses, handsome graduates, or glimpses of student's privileged lives must have only reinforced existing images of class. Such images emerge, for example, in "Industry Snaps Up Grads," *Business Week*, 2 May 1953, 116-118; "Scramble for a Degree: How Many Will Get into College?" *Newsweek* 49 (14 January 1957): 76-79; and Sally and James Reston, "So We Sent Our Son to College," *Saturday Evening Post* 228 (5 May 1956): 37. For instance, "Job Outlook for Class of '54: Plenty of Openings—Pay Above a Year Ago," *U.S. News and World Report* 36 (30 April 1954): 37-40, combines this materialistic headline with a picture of a gothic collegiate archway and college students talking on the quad. I noticed also that these articles normally discussed and pictured Ivy League students and schools, further forwarding an image of upper-middle class privilege.

⁵⁵"Boys Will Be Boys," *Time*, 25 November 1946, 66.

⁵⁶"Life Goes to a Summer Prom," *Life* 27 (22 August 1949): 88-89; "Life Goes to Derby Day at Yale," *Life* 24 (24 May 1948): 153-4; "Syracuse Spring Weekend," *Life* 26 (30 May 1949): 73. *Life's* continued fascination with college life may be glimpsed with articles like "College Humor," *Life* 27 (5 December 1949): 49; "Some Outstanding College Graduates of '49," *Life* 26 (13 June 1949): 95; "Frosh Just Love to be Miserable," *Life* 27 (31 October 1949): 51-52; and "Life Goes Back to a Party," *Life* 29 (16 October 1950): 188-90. *Life* covered college events prior to the war but not in this volume.

between the coed University of Missouri and the all-female Smith College (a picture of the Missouri coed graced the cover). This article, however, raised the issue of collegiate women's images in the media and their reflection of changing American educational expectations in the wake of the GI Bill. The article asked which type of education better served the overall needs of women in society—coed or all-female. The depiction of the Missouri coed's life certainly seemed more appealing. Her activities revolved around dates, the right clothes, and parties; her profile ended with pictures from a fraternity party. In contrast Janet Trowbridge's life at Smith appeared sheltered even austere. Janet excelled at school whereas Jane (the coed) barely pulled C's. Smith looked appropriately sedate and intellectual compared to the active social life available at Missouri.⁵⁷ Smith represented an academic educational experience similar in content to men while Missouri stood for the preparation of women to fit "modern" reality. Despite being at college, the female at Missouri continued to adhere to stereotypically female activities (socializing), while the Smith student challenged popular standards by devoting herself to academics. And, tellingly, the vast majority of the letters *Life* received on the article agreed that the Missouri educational experience was the more appropriate for women.⁵⁸

The impact of the Second World War on women's place in American society continues to fuel scholarly debate. As historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese noted in a recent article, the legacy is complex. The image of Rosie the Riveter seemed to symbolize and legitimize women's place in the American workforce, and Fox-Genovese points out that the absolute numbers and the proportion of female participation in the American workforce increased in postwar years. Yet, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* asserted that an ideological consensus restricting women to traditional domestic roles solidified after the war. Fox-Genovese even acknowledges the existence of this consensus in national print media, despite her reservations about using it to generalize for postwar America. This complex and seemingly contradictory picture (increased female economic participation intertwined with a popular consensus positing an ideal of women as wives and mothers) likely fits the reality of the situation quite well, and certainly conforms to the mixed messages and legacies emerging from the GI Bill coverage.⁵⁹

Life magazine's "Missouri vs. Smith" article on one level reflected the positive effects of wartime experience and the popularization of collegiate

⁵⁷"Missouri vs. Smith," *Life* 26 (9 May 1949): 68-73.

⁵⁸Letters to the Editor, *Life* 26 (30 May 1949): 2.

⁵⁹Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Mixed Messages: Women and the Impact of World War II," *Southern Humanities Review* 27 (Summer 1993): 235-238. Also, Susan M. Hartmann argues that the war did bring massive changes for women in the economy and society that made a return to the "status quo antebellum" very difficult. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 27.

aspirations resulting from the coverage of the GI Bill. Before 1945 such an article would not have been worthy of a cover story. The underlying current of opinion in the article, however, that a coed's socializing experiences were valued more than the academic experience, evidenced some of the negative effects for women in American society that may be associated with the GI Bill. During the war the enrollment of women in colleges and universities had increased in some schools by as much as 35 percent.⁶⁰ More families had more money as a result of war jobs, and with a brother off to war some daughters received the college funds instead. A soldier's letter to the editor of *Newsweek* responding to an article on this trend, however, offered a portrait of postwar attitudes. The letter's first sentence flippantly dismissed the idea of more women in college as "fine, for it shows something or other about people and education." He argued, though, that the war effort would be better served if these women took war jobs or enlisted.⁶¹ As this soldier's letter indicated, many felt that a college education for women, though quite nice, was hardly essential. Many colleges and universities reinforced such notions after the war by sharply curtailing the number of women allowed into college in order to accommodate the veterans.⁶² Women's educational achievements, then, sustained a setback during the postwar years. Although the absolute numbers of women in higher educational institutions continually increased after the war, their numbers relative to men declined.⁶³ Vassar's percentage of women enrolling in physics and chemistry fell markedly as female interest in core academic subjects appeared to dissipate in a postwar atmosphere that reasserted the virtues of family life.⁶⁴

If the war had fostered a cultural consensus urging women to devote themselves to domestic life upon the return of their soldier-husbands, the predominant images of women as wives and mothers in postwar articles on the GI Bill appeared to fall in line with and to have encouraged that trend. Articles mentioning a war wife taking classes or enrolling under the GI Bill are hard to find.⁶⁵ Only a few articles on the GI Bill mention that education and training benefits applied for GI Jane as well as Joe.⁶⁶ All articles on

⁶⁰"Degree for Daughter," *Newsweek* 22 (November 1, 1943): 80.

⁶¹Letter to the Editor, *Newsweek* 22 (December 26, 1943): 6.

⁶²Solomon, 180. Two 1947 *Seventeen* articles reporting on the possibility of going to college specifically mention this problem for women. "Sitting This Year Out," *Seventeen*, January 1947, 58-59; and Alice Beaton, "It's a Poor Year for Coasting," *Seventeen*, September 1947, 19.

⁶³Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 116.

⁶⁴Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 184. The percentage of women taking their doctorates would not match the prewar percentages until 1970.

⁶⁵Of all the articles on GIs at school only John Morris "Married Veterans Take Over the Campus," *Ladies Home Journal* 63 (October 1946): 32-39, included anything approaching equity regarding coverage of wives going to school alongside with their husbands.

⁶⁶"For GI Jane," *Time*, 15 January 1945, 72, was the only article in the major periodicals to devote exclusive attention to women.

the veterans noted or pictured the living conditions of the families usually to highlight the difficult conditions imposed on the veteran student or to emphasize his academic achievement despite familial distractions and financial hardships. If articles featured wives, they showed her as a master of stretching the dollars of inadequate GI Bill subsistence payments.⁶⁷ If coverage of college veterans increased the stock of cultural images of men from all backgrounds in college graduating to good white-collar jobs, the images of women acted most often to strengthen their traditional roles.

The broader effects of the GI Bill coverage in stirring public imagination about college, however, did precipitate an explosion of periodical coverage of higher education generally. Thus, the sheer volume of articles and ads referring directly or indirectly to women at college did increase during the late 1940s and 1950s, making the net effects of the GI Bill perhaps more positive than negative in the long run. Changes in college coverage in *Seventeen* magazine provide perhaps the best examples to illustrate the trend. Started in 1944, *Seventeen's* ads, articles, and short stories may be considered reliable barometers of young women's career goals and life preferences.

Choices between marriage, career, and college formed constant themes in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During the late 1940's, however, college took a backseat to marriage and career. For instance, advertisements incorporating a marriage theme far outnumbered those on college themes.⁶⁸ Additionally, three short stories in 1947 were set on college campuses, but in two cases the girl was visiting her college boyfriend to resolve a romance, not attending herself.⁶⁹ Articles that discussed the future of the teenage graduate focused on career moves, encouraging girls to gain secretarial skills while in high school.⁷⁰ In contrast, by 1949 a "seniors only" series of articles encouraged women to go to college with advice on career moves tak-

⁶⁷Articles like Rosa Lee Jay "The Battle for Subsistence," *Ladies Home Journal* 64 (November 1947): 252-54; and Mackage, "Crisis at the Colleges," 9-10, featured the wife as a super-housewife and mother. Overall, the novelty of wives on campus attracted attention and proved a favorite subject of GI Bill articles. Articles like "Married Undergrads," *Time*, 10 December 1945): 69-70, commenting on how perfume now wafted through the air instead of pipe smoke in a Dartmouth fraternity, proved typical of most. Two *Life* articles, for instance, showed plenty of pictures of wives at school, but the pictures focused on her at home and the husband at school or studying. "Veterans at College," *Life* 20 (7 January 1946): 37-42; and "Veterans at College," *Life* 22 (21 April 1947): 105-113.

⁶⁸Typical is an ad for Keepsake Diamond Rings, *Seventeen*, October 1947, 35.

⁶⁹"The Tomboy Touch," *Seventeen*, January 1947, 46 and 129; and "Trains Leave Every Hour," *Seventeen*, January 1947, 60-61 and 96.

⁷⁰Frances Ardette, "Start Learning in School," *Seventeen*, March 1947, 86; Alison Carr, "Sitting This Year Out," *Seventeen*, January 1947, 58-59. Only one article appeared during the year on choosing a college. Betty Booth, "How to Choose a College," *Seventeen*, March 1947, 182-83.

ing a secondary role.⁷¹ Finally, college themes appeared more consistently in advertisements. For instance, whereas a Camay soap ad in 1947 displayed a series of pictures leading from high school to marriage, in 1949 the Camay ads had incorporated a college setting, although the plot still ended in marriage.⁷² And, unlike previous years, the college setting dominated the 1954 fall fashion advertisements.⁷³

The increasing attention given to women in college, as exemplified in *Seventeen*, must be viewed carefully. On one hand it indicated a heightened public openness of college as a legitimate option for American youth, a possibility enhanced by the coverage of the GI Bill. On the other hand, the most common collegiate images of females were found in advertisements and emphasized the sophisticated nature of the college female. For instance, a full-page 1947 bra ad in *Seventeen* portrayed an attractive and sophisticated college girl lounging on a chair in her sorority or dormitory, adorned in pearls, Yale and Princeton pennants on the wall, her hand raised as if lecturing two other girls on the finer points of college life.⁷⁴ Similarly, two full-page luggage ads (1947 and 1949), picturing stylishly dressed women advised the reader that their respective luggage sets presented the best first impression.⁷⁵ And, representative of many fashion ads, one clothing store ad pictures a woman in a tweed suit at a football game holding a Yale pennant.⁷⁶ The dominant characterization of the college female emphasized her polished sensibilities rather than her intellectual achievements or career potential. Whereas male college images in the media at least offered college as an economic as well as a social opportunity, female images focused chiefly on the connection between college and social status or upper-class sophistication. Just as the predominant images of the GI Bill reinforced women's roles as wife and mother rather than student, the expansion of female college images connected with the popularization of college most often highlighted non-academic, traditional womanhood in a new setting.

⁷¹Elaine Greene, "Don't Forget Next Year," *Seventeen*, August 1949, 60; Tess Williams, "What About Next Fall?" *Seventeen*, September 1949, 85 and 178; and Dona Jean Murren, "College Is a World," *Seventeen*, May 1949, 76. In 1954, two articles promoted the non-traditional careers of engineer and pilot with college attendance figuring prominently in both. Hilda Slauterbark, "Engineering, a Big Future," *Seventeen*, April 1954, 180 and 186; and Gretel Sternberg-Knight, "The Widest Outlook," *Seventeen*, February 1954, 126-7.

⁷²Camay advertisement, *Seventeen*, March 1949, 7; and Camay advertisement, *Seventeen*, September 1954, 97.

⁷³Carole King Juniors advertisement, *Seventeen*, August 1954, 54; Sanforized advertisement, *Seventeen*, September 1954, 105; Laskinlamb advertisement, *Seventeen*, August 1954, 225; Sanforized advertisement, *Seventeen*, August 1954, 160-161; Campus Caper, *Seventeen*, November 1954, 66. Although not a fashion ad, Playtex began utilizing a college theme in 1954. *Seventeen*, September 1954, 5.

⁷⁴Edith Lances Bras advertisement, *Seventeen*, July 1947, 196.

⁷⁵Samsonite Luggage advertisement, *Seventeen*, September 1947, 10; and White Star Luggage advertisement, *Seventeen*, August 1949, 30.

⁷⁶Miller's advertisement, *Seventeen*, August 1949, 111.

That the GI Bill influenced a massive rethinking of the place of college education in American society is not an earthshaking conclusion. But the impact of the GI Bill went far deeper than historians have previously described. The GI Bill set a precedent for increased access and perhaps accelerated the trend toward vocationally oriented curricula, but these developments cannot adequately demonstrate how collegiate aspirations grew more popularized in American culture as a result of the GI Bill. And, this refashioning of the role of a college education in American life was connected to a broader shift in American cultural values that had been gradually occurring since early in this century.

A wide segment of the population that during the next decade would come to consider themselves as broadly middle class likely found the new image of college in the GI Bill story appealing because it revealed a new route to the American Dream. But this American Dream was characterized more by making one's way in a corporate world: a successful and fulfilling life defined more by the lifestyle one led and the consumables that communicated the right image. The messages enmeshed within media depictions of college after the GI Bill phenomenon corresponded with these new values and ideals on an unprecedented scale.

At this point one can only speculate on the degree of tension created by these contrasting images of higher education sparked by the GI Bill. By themselves, the conclusions shed some much needed light on how the GI Bill influenced changes in American cultural perceptions of college education. Additionally, the fact that the democratization of colleges was accompanied by the survival of and popular identification with prewar connections linking college with middle-class status and a circumscribed vision of college education for females, offers an important corrective to prevailing views of the impact of the GI Bill that stress its democratic legacy. The GI Bill did inspire a cultural rethinking of the value of higher education upon which the increasing postwar demand for a college education was built, but the legacies of the GI Bill cannot be said to have been entirely democratic. New conceptions of accessibility to college cut both ways. It made college seem more democratic and practical and, at the same time, encouraged public expectations and aspirations that they could attain the trappings of middle-class status. Moreover, it was a new middle-class status aligned with the imperatives of a corporate world and a consumer ethos, and yet assembled with several traditional notions of what made one middle class. If the contradictory mix of democratic and elite collegiate images in the periodical literature arising in the wake of the GI Bill may be said to have reflected and informed postwar expectations of higher education, then this could help explain some of the popular disillusionment with higher education when the realities of mass (democratic) education failed to satisfy all facets of those expectations.