

LATEST HEADLINES**Black WWII veterans would get G.I. benefits under Seth Moulton bill**

FILE – Major James A. Ellison, left, returns the salute of Mac Ross of Dayton, Ohio, as he inspects the cadets at the Basic and Advanced Flying School for Black United States Army Air Corps cadets at the Tusgee Institute in Tuskegee, Ala., in Jan. 23, 1942. For Veterans Day, a group of Democratic lawmakers is reviving an effort to pay the families of Black servicemen who fought on behalf of the nation during World War



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The benefits of the G.I. Bill, often thought of as the path to the middle class for millions of WWII veterans, were largely denied to Black veterans. U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Salem, hopes to change that with a new bill.

“Many Black veterans were ... denied benefits, denied homes, denied the generational wealth that comes from going to college,” Moulton, a veteran and the author of the bill, said in a statement. “We can never fully repay those American heroes. But we can fix this going forward for their families.”

The bill would extend access to the VA Loan Guaranty Program and educational assistance benefits to the direct descendants of Black WWII veterans and would require studies of the number of people who received these and other benefits, including female and minority members of the Armed Forces.

For most white veterans, the G.I. Bill was “their pathway to the middle class,” said Matthew Delmont, a history professor at Dartmouth College. “It was an acknowledgement of the tremendous sacrifices that veterans had made in service to the country, and it provided them with access to education benefits, health care benefits, and also potentially to get mortgages to buy homes.”

Although the G.I. Bill was not specifically discriminatory to Black veterans, because it was intentionally managed at the state level rather than at the federal level, Black veterans were denied access to the benefits in large numbers, Delmont said. Discrimination was especially high in states like Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, which adhered to Jim Crow laws at the time.

Veterans’ homes’ values shot up over time for those who purchased them with G.I. funds, and many veterans’ wages did, too, given the education benefits. Meanwhile, “you’re talking about trillions of dollars that have been purposely siphoned out of the Black community,” said Richard Brookshire, a Black veteran and the co-founder of the Black Veterans Project. “What a difference that could have made.”



On top of the lost intergenerational wealth, Black WWII veterans also dealt with racism during and after their service. Damon Dorsey, executive director of National Association of Minority Veterans of America, said his Black WWII vet father experienced racism during his service such as “being thrown in the brig for literally nothing,” he said. After he returned, he was unemployed for several years, facing hiring discrimination, and also struggled to buy a home.

His organization endorsed Moulton’s bill, citing the “domino effect” the discrimination had on Black families.

For Ron E. Armstead, director of the Congressional Black Caucus Veterans Braintrust, a Black Bostonian and a Vietnam veteran, the city’s history of racism against Black vets makes this bill even more significant.

“We have the Boston Massacre, the Battle of Bunker Hill, we jump ahead to the 54th regiment,” he said. “Blacks have gone off and fought for what they thought was freedom, equality and the rights of man, only to come back and be relegated to second class citizenship,” he said. His organization also endorsed the bill.

Some also see this bill as the more palatable first step toward a reparations bill for Black Americans.

“The esteem in which the vast majority of Americans hold veterans is extraordinarily high,” Delmont, of Dartmouth, said. “If we can’t acknowledge the importance of righting this wrong for veterans, I don’t see how we would ever be able to right wrongs for any Black Americans.”

The bill’s official title, *The Sgt. Isaac Woodard, Jr. and Sgt. Joseph H. Maddox G.I. Bill Restoration Act of 2021*, is named after two Black WWII veterans.

Woodard Jr. was traveling home to South Carolina after an honorable discharge, still in uniform, when a police chief forced him out of a bus and blinded him with his nightstick. The chief was later acquitted of his crime by an all-white jury. The abuse prompted President Truman to sign an Executive Order integrating the armed services.

Maddox was injured during his service and medically discharged. He later was accepted to Harvard University for a master’s degree program, but was denied tuition assistance from his local VA office to “avoid setting a precedent.” The NAACP got involved and got Maddox the benefits he earned.





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Amy Sokolow is a general assignment and statehouse reporter for The Boston Herald, a position she started in June 2021. Prior to starting at The Herald, she was a reporter at The Lowell Sun, and previously reported for STAT News, The Boston Guardian, Native News Online, FierceBiotech and other publications. She also worked in product management at The Atlantic. She holds a bachelor's degree from Tufts University and a master's degree from Northwestern University. She grew up on the North Shore, and will always say yes to a scoop of Richardson's ice cream. Follow Amy on Twitter [@amysokolow](#).

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