

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The North Carolina College for Negroes, the Veterans Administration, and The “G.I. Bill
of Rights”

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by
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Introduction

“I really don’t think there is much to tell,” responded World War II veteran Brooklyn McMillan when asked about his experience using G.I. Bill Benefits at North Carolina College for Negroes in Durham, now North Carolina Central University. “I left school because I was called up in 1942, went to OCS [Officer Candidate School], became what they called a ‘Ninety Day Wonder’. I was then stationed in Hawaii working on aircraft communications, then on to Okinawa. Came back in the spring of 46’ and continued with school. Pretty simple.”¹ However, when Mr. McMillan arrived home from the war and returned to school, there was in fact a change in the financing of his education. He openly acknowledges the G.I. Bill paid for the remainder of his undergraduate studies, and a graduate degree as well. At ninety years old, Mr. McMillan has been a part of the student, faculty and administrative bodies of N.C. Central University since he finished his undergraduate degree 1947. Despite his lengthy tenure at the school, MacMillan does not remember the G.I. Bill having any real or lasting significance, although he does remember that it attracted quite a few veterans.²

The G.I. Bill provided World War II veterans matriculating to the North Carolina College for Negroes with the financial assistance necessary to attend the school. Prior to the G.I. Bill, there was little help from any organizations, public or private, to assist in paying the costs of higher education for students at NCCN. For example, the college’s Student Handbook for the school year 1944-45, asserts that “Only two kinds of financial assistance are available: Scholarships to students of exceptional ability, and part-time

¹ Brooklyn Macmillan interviewed by Erich Estilow, North Carolina Central University, September 6, 2007

² Ibid.

employment. Unfortunately the amount of financial aid which the college can give is very limited.”³ Immediately after the war, letters from residences and VA offices addressed to NCCN, indicate that African-American veterans in North Carolina did in fact express the desire to attend an institution of higher education.

Recent historical evidence suggests that African-American veterans in the Jim Crow South had difficulties claiming benefits that pertained to education, vocational rehabilitation, employment, unemployment insurance, and home and small business loans, which were guaranteed by the G.I. Bill and administered through local branches of the Veterans Administration and the United States Employment Office.⁴ Despite being an African-American institution of higher education in the Jim Crow South, it appears that the North Carolina College for Negroes did receive fair treatment from local, regional, and national Veteran’s Administration offices. In fact, archives at North Carolina Central University reveal a story that is not dissimilar from written accounts pertaining to the experience of white schools and G.I. Bill veterans. These archives span a two-year period (1944-1946), and contain numerous correspondences between the school’s founder and longstanding president Dr. James E. Shepard, and various government offices. World War II veterans that matriculated to the North Carolina College for Negroes were not discriminated against by the Veteran’s Administration because Dr. Shepard was well connected to the state’s white political structure, and used that influence to facilitate and expand the school’s postwar veteran population.

Background

³ North Carolina College for Negroes, *Student Handbook- 1944-1945*.

⁴ David H. Onkst, “First a Negro...Incidentally a Veteran”: Black World War Two Veterans and the G.I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948” *Journal of Social History* (Spring, 1998): 517-543. www.jstor.org/ (accessed April 2, 2007), 519.

The genesis of the G.I. Bill was rooted in the U.S. government's poor treatment of World War I veterans, combined with a lasting economic depression. Initially, the only compensation granted to American veterans of World War I was two month's salary payable upon an honorable discharge.⁵ In 1919 the American Legion was created in order to lobby on behalf of embittered veterans. The Legion pressured Congress for additional compensation, and in 1924 the "Adjusted Service Certificate Law" was passed.⁶ Instead of an immediate payment, the government issued bonus certificates to eligible veterans.⁷ The bonus certificates represented a twenty-year endowment fund, designed to eventually accumulate enough money through compound interest, to pay an average individual bonus of about one thousand dollars by 1945.⁸

The stock market crash of 1929, which ushered in the Great Depression, galvanized veterans into demanding their bonus payments early. During the summer of 1932, nearly 30,000 veterans, some with families, descended upon Washington to peacefully demand redemption of bonus certificates.⁹ Calling themselves' the B.E.F., or "Bonus Expeditionary Force", the former members of the American Expeditionary Force spent the summer demonstrating in front of the Capitol building. The tremendous display of activism failed to make any immediate changes.¹⁰ Instead, on July 28, 1932,

⁵ Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1974), 4.

⁶ Donald J. Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, MacArthur, and the Bonus Riot* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 8.

⁷ Davis R.B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰ Ross, 17

President Hoover ordered General Douglas MacArthur, to rid Washington of the B.E.F.¹¹ The four infantry companies, a machine gun company, and six tanks under MacArthur's command used tear gas to disperse protesting veterans, and then proceeded to torch their makeshift dwellings along the banks of the Anacostia River.¹² In 1936, a bonus was awarded under the first Roosevelt administration, but the veterans were already well into their middle age. For many, the money just served as a temporary solution to the financial woes congruous with Depression-era American life.¹³

As the inheritors of the nearly twenty year dispute between the Federal government and World War I veterans', the Roosevelt administration shaped the G.I. Bill in the spirit of the New Deal.¹⁴ That is, the "deeply ingrained notion that veterans could be helped best by helping all Americans."¹⁵ In a radio address to the nation on July 28, 1943, Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed,

"Among many other things we are, today, laying plans for the return to civilian life of our gallant men and women in the armed services. They must not be demobilized into an environment of inflation and unemployment, to a place on a bread line, or on a corner selling apples. We must, this time, have plans ready-instead of waiting to do a hasty, inefficient and ill considered job at the last moment. I have assured our men in the armed forces that the American people would not let them down when the war was won."¹⁶

¹¹ Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker and Company, 2004), 171.

¹² Ross, 18.

¹³ Rufus E. Clement, "Problems of Demobilization and Rehabilitation of the Negro Soldier after World War II," *The Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1943): 533-542. www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 8, 2007), 535.

¹⁴ Ross, 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ Franklin Roosevelt, "On Progress of War, and Plans of Peace," *Fireside Chats*, www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/fires90.html.

Roosevelt, like the majority of Americans, was concerned that the economic relief caused by the war would recede with the war's conclusion. The President was interested in not only fostering employment, but education as well.

An NAACP summary of the G.I. Bill's Title II, which pertained to education benefits, reiterated that all individuals discharged other than dishonorably, serving for at least ninety days between September 16, 1940 and the termination of the war, were eligible for subsidized education.¹⁷ Moreover, "everyone meeting these requirements is entitled to take refresher courses and retraining for up to one year. The only stipulation placed on educational training was that the student's work must meet the prescribed standards of the institution while there."¹⁸ Government subsidized refresher training created by colleges was imperative in helping African-American veterans in the Jim Crow South prepare for college level work. In the 1940's, junior colleges were not widespread, and decades of segregation in South had severely hindered the quality and availability of African-American secondary schools.

Historiography

There are two distinct periods of historical interest pertaining to the World War II G.I. Bill. The first period was brief, and resulted with the publishing of two texts during the early 1970's. Davis Ross's *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* details the Roosevelt administration's creation of the G.I. Bill, and the political maneuvering that was necessary to enact it into law. The book that stands out

¹⁷ "General Office File: G.I. Bill," Frame # 00925 in *Papers of the NAACP. Part 9: Discrimination in the Armed Forces. Series A* University Publications of America, Frederick, Maryland.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the most from this period is Keith Olson's *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*, published in 1974. This text provides a "trim historical summary of the reciprocal relationships between World War II veterans and colleges, concentrating on the period 1946-1953."¹⁹ Information regarding the G.I. Bill and African-American colleges in this text is rather limited. Moreover, there is no mention of discrimination on behalf of the Veteran's Administration. Olson does, however, cite some vital quantitative data. For example, with three exceptions, all African-American universities were located in seventeen Southern states and Washington D.C.²⁰ Less than five percent of these schools were accredited by the Association of American Universities, and half these schools had less than 250 students enrolled.²¹ However, the matriculation of G.I. Bill veterans caused total enrollment in African-American universities to surge from 43, 003 in 1940 to 76,600 by 1950.²²

The second period of scholarly interest in the G.I. Bill began in the mid -1990's, and has continued to the present. In fact, since 2005 there have been three academic texts published about the G.I. Bill. The renewed interest has undoubtedly occurred due to the rapid passing of the World War II generation. Ideas and theories stemming from current texts and journal articles are controversial and divisive among G.I. Bill historians. For example, the thesis of Suzanne Mettler's book *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*, contemplates the positive effects G.I. Bill beneficiaries had on civic engagement and community action throughout the country.

¹⁹ Davis R.B. Ross, review of *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*, by Keith Olson, *The Journal of American History*, December 1974, 840-841. www.jstor.org/ (accessed February 26, 2007)

²⁰ Olson, 74.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²² *Ibid.*, 75.

Mettler states, “The lessons of the G.I. Bill offer us powerful evidence that through public investment that acknowledges civic obligation with expanded social opportunity, democracy itself may be revitalized.”²³ Chapter eight in *Soldiers to Citizens* is entitled “Mobilizing for Equal Rights.” In this chapter, Mettler argues that African-American veterans that utilized the G.I. Bill to obtain a college education became the vanguard of the Civil Rights movement by immersing themselves in civic organization active in the political sphere.²⁴ Micheal Gambone’s *The Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* looks at veteran re-integration into society through analysis of popular culture depictions. *Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream* by Edward Humes, relies heavily upon interviews of notable G.I. Bill recipients and the contributions they made to American society. Neither of these two aforementioned books makes any new or significant contributions to the study of the G.I. Bill and African-American veterans.

The most comprehensive essay addressing the African-American experience with the G.I. Bill is David Onkst’s “First a Negro...Incidentally a Veteran”: Black World War II Veterans and the G.I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948.” This well crafted essay is primarily what gave me the idea for my thesis. Onkst challenges other historians’ perceptions that *every* World War II veteran had access to the G.I. Bill, and were consequently able to use it to improve livelihood.²⁵ His research focuses on the conditions returning veterans faced in three Deep South states; Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. In these states, Onkst discovered that “the law called for two federally

²³ Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 175.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁵ Onkst, 518.

funded agencies, the VA and the USES [Unites States Employment Service], to administer all of the bill's provisions, southern black veterans found that they would still have to visit *local* VA and USES centers, which were staffed almost exclusively by white employees, to claim their benefits.”²⁶ This created a situation in which African-American veterans in the Deep South were channeled into low-paying, unskilled jobs, denied unemployment insurance, and systematically turned down for home and small-business loans. The educational provision was popular in these states, but deficiencies in secondary education limited the majority of veterans in the Deep South to subsidized vocational training. These institutions were plagued with financial troubles, as well as corrupt administrations that only sought the veteran's money.²⁷

My contribution to the history of the G.I. Bill is to bring something new, by examining on a micro-level, the dynamics that occurred between the North Carolina College for Negroes, the veterans it attracted, and the government that subsequently paid for their education. The goal of this paper is not to show that the school's experience was exceptional compared to the other four African-American colleges in North Carolina, or for that matter, the South. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the G.I. Bill did give some African-American World War II veterans in North Carolina access to higher education, and that the North Carolina College for Negroes was treated fairly by the Veterans Administration with the accommodation of its veteran students.

Preparing for Demobilization

²⁶ Ibid., 519.

²⁷ Ibid., 527-8.

A month after the G.I. Bill was enacted the murder of an African-American soldier by a city bus driver sparked a massive riot in Durham, North Carolina.²⁸ The riot occurred on July 9, 1944. It was the result of building tensions between the large population of African-American servicemen stationed in nearby Camp Butler, and the local white population. Many of the African-Americans stationed at Camp Butler were from Northern states, and were disinclined to obey North Carolina's segregation laws.²⁹ The riot, which occurred near the same neighborhood as North Carolina College for Negroes' campus, served as a harsh reminder of the unchanged conditions that returning African-American veterans from North Carolina could expect when they arrived home from the war. When asked about returning home to segregation after serving his country, the aforementioned Brooklyn Macmillan simply responded, "Segregation was the law, and you had to abide by the law."³⁰

Regional branches of the Veterans Administration were established to facilitate the distribution of G.I. Bill benefits. The Veterans Administration (VA) branch established in Fayetteville, North Carolina was assigned to handle educational benefit claims by all veterans attending college within the State of North Carolina. VA Fayetteville's first communication with the North Carolina College for Negroes (NCCN), a letter dated July 19, 1944, notified the College that the branch was open and prepared to begin accepting applications. Addressed to Dr. James E. Shepard, the communication simply informed him that "Any person who has served in the military or naval service on

²⁸ Timothy B. Tyson, "Wars for Democracy: African-American Militancy and Interracial Violence in North Carolina during World War II," in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, ed. Davis S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson et al. (Chapel Hill: The University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 263.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 264.

³⁰ Interview with Brooklyn Macmillan.

or after Sep. 16, 1940,” can receive benefits by contacting any “regional Office of the Veterans Administration where his claims folder is now filed, or with the regional office of the state he is wishing to seek training.”³¹ The timely service provided by the VA was important. As early as the summer of 1944, a year before war was officially over, NCCN had two eligible veterans requesting the use of educational benefits.³² In order to receive financial assistance through the VA, the veteran was required to fill out VA Form 1906 entitled “Notice of Entrance Into Training” and submit it to the school’s registrar, to be sent to the VA for approval.³³

The inevitable surge of veteran-students required a great deal of detailed administrative work between the schools and the Veterans Administration. Instead of immediately creating a separate Office of Veterans Affairs within NCCN, the school’s president, Dr. Shepard, chose to handle all correspondence with the VA personally. This attention to detail was not out character for the President whose personal philosophy required NCCN’s faculty and administration to educate for equality, and to make the best use of all available resources.³⁴ By attending to the affairs of NCCN veterans, Shepard was able to ensure the establishment of a strong and cordial relationship between his school and the VA.

Dr. Shepard founded NCCN, and remained its President until his death in 1947. The school’s success and longevity was based on his own personal sense of pragmatism.

³¹ J.S. Pittman to James Shepard, July 19, 1944, letter folder 1, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University, Durham

³² Ben Husbands to James Shepard, September 8, 1944, *ibid*.

³³ Ben Husbands to James Shepard, September 8, 1944, letter folder 1, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University, Durham.

³⁴ Harry L. Faggett, “The Shepard Tradition,” *The Journal of American Negro Education* (Autumn, 1949): 484-488. www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 7, 2007).

Shepard worked very carefully not to alienate himself from the white political establishment that appropriated funds for his college. Throughout his career, he maintained dictatorial control over all matters concerning NCCN, and was considered somewhat conservative in comparison to other African-American leaders of the era.³⁵ Criticism of Shepard was derived from perceptions that he placated white politicians in order to procure funds for his school. English professor Harry Faggett explained,

To gain additional funds for Negro educational advancement, Dr. Shepard apparently combined diplomatic political pressure with co-operative manipulation, the method of a Southern clergymen, expert in the art of “respectable begging.” Through the sincerity of his efforts he earned the deepest respect of Southern white politicians. He convinced them that the Negro was one of the weak links in their chain of progress and that when they helped him they helped themselves.³⁶

In 1939, Shepard procured funding to establish graduate programs in liberal studies, library science, and law through the Supreme Court decision in the *Missouri vs. Gaines* case.³⁷ This expansion of degree programs and facilities enabled Shepard to transform NCCN into the first publicly funded African-American college in North Carolina to offer graduate degrees.³⁸

In preparation for the end of the war, NCCN was solicited by government organizations outside of the VA for general information to be passed on to inquiring soldiers. A letter sent from Lawson General Hospital, Atlanta to the NCCN registrar in September 1944, stated that “many of our patients are residents of North Carolina and contemplate completing their education...we wish to have some specific information

³⁵ Ibid., 484.

³⁶ Ibid., 486.

³⁷ George W. Reid, “James E. Shepard and the Public Record of the Founding of North Carolina College at Durham 1909-1948” *Negro History Bulletin*: (November-December, 1948), 902.

³⁸ Ibid, 902.

concerning your plans for services to veterans.”³⁹ Specific information requested included credit awarded for military training or experience, guidance services for veterans, living arrangements for married veterans, and copies of course catalogues.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the officer, writing on the behalf of disabled patients, was interested if the college had developed any program to prepare veterans for upper-level college work.⁴¹ Dr. Shepard responded two days later, and admitted that the school had not yet made any provisions for married students, but did have plans to implement college preparation courses in the curriculum.⁴²

In January of 1945, NCCN was contacted by three more divisions of the armed forces that were working to implement programs that were planning for the inevitable mass demobilization of troops. The first communication came from a department in the Army Air Corps located in New York City. The officer informed the school, “The promotion and supervision of the education advisement of troops is one of the important functions of this headquarters section.”⁴³ Similar to the hospital in Georgia, the Air Corps requested materials that could help the service inform veterans about any programs available to them at NCCN. The second organization that contacted NCCN in early 1945 was the Army Service Forces, Third Service command Fort Meade, Maryland. This letter informed the school that the mission of Army Service Forces was to facilitate the

³⁹ Robert Hughes to James Shepard, September 16, 1944, folder 1, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² James Shepard to Robert Hughes, September 19, 1944, folder 1, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

⁴³ Harold Hand to James Shepard, January 5, 1945, folder 2, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

soldier's transition into civilian life. To do this, Army Service Forces gave every soldier individual counseling in order to:

- A. Settle any military problems that he might have
- B. Secure information relative to employment, re-employment or other vocational problems.
- C. Familiarize him with legislation relative to veteran's benefits, right, etc.
- D. Secure information concerning future educational plans.
- E. Secure assistance with regard to any personal problems that may be awaiting him upon his return home.⁴⁴

In order to conduct well-informed interviews, the Army Service Forces requested course catalogues, and asked to be placed on a mailing list as well. The final correspondence sent to NCCN concerning the demobilization of troops came from the U.S. Office of Education in Washington D.C. The letter from USOE was not a request *for* information, but rather a notice that the organization was working to provide schools with information on the G.I. Bill. It informed the school's administration that it had been publishing a semi-monthly entitled, *Higher Education*, designed to keep colleges updated with information pertaining to any postwar planning concerning demobilization and the G.I. Bill.⁴⁵

The direct interaction between the military and NCCN throughout January of 1945 was important because it showed a concerted effort on behalf of the government to inform all of its service personnel of their options provided by the G.I. Bill. The communication and the information it garnered undoubtedly served as a warning signal to Dr. Shepard, and his faculty of events to come. The G.I. Bill gave a different type of

⁴⁴ William Hinton to North Carolina College for Negroes, January 23, 1945, folder 2, "File #148 Veterans Administration," North Carolina Central University.

⁴⁵ Lloyd Blauch to James Shepard, January 31, 1945, folder 2, "File #148 Veterans Administration," North Carolina Central University.

student access to higher education. It afforded married individuals the opportunity to attend school, which forced the schools themselves to adjust to the type of student they were educating. Moreover, the G.I. Bill caused the colleges themselves to become vehicles to higher education, by forcing institutions to create classes designed to prepare individuals for college-level studies. As in the case of NCCN, most colleges had to create prep schools for veterans in order to fill the void created by inadequate secondary schools and almost non-existent community colleges.⁴⁶

The Veterans Arrive

In the autumn of 1945, letters from veterans began pouring into Dr. Shepard's office. The first of these letters arrived on September 4, less than a month after victory over Japan was declared. The letter was addressed directly to Dr. Shepard, from William P. Arnold of Tarboro, North Carolina. "I am writing asking you to send me a bulletin and necessary blanks, which explain educational benefits and offerings that are available at government expense under the G.I. Bill of Rights. Before inducted into service for my country, I was a high school graduate. I would like to enter your college winter quarter."⁴⁷ Over the next few months, veterans sent letters requesting similar information. Some were specific, requesting information about different areas of study such as business and photography. In other letters, veterans just expressed a willingness to continue their general education. Dr. Shepard replied to most of the letters that the

⁴⁶ Nelson H. Harris, "Negro Higher and Professional Education in North Carolina," *The Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1948): 335-340, www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 8, 2007).

⁴⁷ William P. Arnold to James Shepard, September 4, 1945, folder 3, "File #148 Veterans Administration," North Carolina Central University.

school would be happy to receive an application and that he would send a course catalogue.⁴⁸

Letters sent from prospective students to NCCN reveal that African-American veterans in North Carolina were well informed and anxious to get on with their lives. On November 30, 1945 Walter Hines of Bladenboro, North Carolina wrote, "I was discharged from the Armed Forces on 4 November 1945. I have filed my application for entering school. The Veterans Administration advised me to write the school I was interested in attending and find out when I would be able to enter. I would like to enter the 1st of the year, or as soon thereafter as possible."⁴⁹ This letter is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, Hines stated that he had been in touch with his local VA office within a few weeks after his discharge, and the training officer had been receptive to inquiries by giving him fairly straightforward and accurate advice. Secondly, the reply that Hines received from Dr. Shepard indicates that demobilizing veterans were matriculating to the school en masse. Hines was advised to immediately send two dollars and fifty cents to the dean of student affairs.⁵⁰ The money was to reserve a room in the dormitories "as there will doubtless be a few vacancies at the beginning of the semester."⁵¹ This implies that within the first six months of the war's conclusion, returning veterans using the G.I. Bill were immediately filling up the classrooms at NCCN. Records indicate that during the fall of 1945, there were eighteen veterans attending the college, out of a student body of seven hundred and eighty four. The

⁴⁸ James Shepard to Isiah Culbreath, September 12, 1945, folder 3, "File #148 Veterans Administration," North Carolina Central University.

⁴⁹ Walter Hines to James Shepard, November 30, 1945,

⁵⁰ James Shepard to William Arnold, November 30, 1945, folder 3, "File #148 Veterans Administration," North Carolina Central University.

⁵¹ Ibid.

following semester the veteran population grew to one hundred and seven, nearly one – seventh of the schools population.⁵²

Although NCCN witnessed a remarkable influx of veteran-students in 1946, numerous African-American veterans only option was to enroll in trade schools, which detracted from the lasting impact of the G.I. Bill. Due to segregated and unequal school systems in the South, many African-American veterans educational attainment prior to service was low, making an education at a four-year college unattainable.⁵³ Although the average African-American soldier in World War II was significantly better educated than his World War I predecessor, the growth was not enough to offset imbalances compared to white school systems.⁵⁴ Part of the G.I. Bill's legacy was that it gave the masses access to institutions that were previously associated with the upper classes in American society. Unfortunately for many African-American veterans, the opportunity for access to a traditional four-year education through the G.I. Bill was lost before they even entered the service.

There is evidence that for many veterans in North Carolina, the only option to further their education with the G.I. Bill was to enroll trade school. One letter sent to NCCN from a VA training officer, implied that he was counseling a veteran that wished to attend school, but admittedly had only achieved a ninth grade education.⁵⁵ Dr.

⁵² James Shepard to C.P. Pate, April 17, 1946, folder 4, "File #148 Veterans Administration," North Carolina Central University.

⁵³ Onkst, 527.

⁵⁴ Spencer Bidwell King Jr., *Selective Service in North Carolina during World War II*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 286.

⁵⁵ G.A. Warlick to James Shepard, November 17, 1945, folder 3, "File #148 Veterans Affairs," North Carolina Central University.

Shepard advised the officer to write North Carolina A & T on behalf of the veteran.⁵⁶

North Carolina A & T experienced remarkable growth in the years immediately following World War II. An advertisement for NC A & T in the NAACP's monthly *The Crisis*, informed readers the school specialized in preparing men and women for careers in agriculture, home economics, industrial arts and commercial industries.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the "institution is known for stressing practical education for service, and for its keen recognition of the problems and needs of ex-servicemen."⁵⁸ During the summer session of 1947, NC A & T reported it had its largest fall enrollment in history, 1,275 students.⁵⁹ Incredibly, by the spring of 1948 A & T's enrollment totaled over 3,000 students, and "veterans as during previous registration periods, formed the major portion of enrollment; 1,681 ex-servicemen are enrolled for the fall term."⁶⁰

Regional branches of the VA authorized and funded Guidance Centers out of some schools with large veteran populations. While the Guidance Center's primary function was to counsel veterans attending those respective schools, they did however, serve as a point of contact for non-student veterans in the surrounding area. Interested in establishing a Guidance Center, Dr. Shepard contacted the head Administrator of the VA in Washington D.C. He inquired into which of "the Negro colleges have been designated as distribution centers of returning veterans," and reminded him NCCN was "one of the four Negro colleges and universities which meets the approval of the Association of

⁵⁶ James Shepard to G.A. Warlick, November 19, 1945, folder 3, "File #148 Veterans Affairs," North Carolina Central University.

⁵⁷ *The Crisis*, August 1947, 229.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁵⁹ "Editorials," *The Crisis*, August 1947, 232.

⁶⁰ "Editorials," *The Crisis*, March 1948, 132.

American Universities.”⁶¹ Hines replied that location for VA Guidance Centers were selected based on the availability of public transportation around the center, proximity to other VA facilities in the area such as hospitals, and timely mail service to the Regional Offices.⁶² He also noted that there were only two Guidance Centers established in African-American schools, neither of which were located in North Carolina.⁶³ This communication sparked a serious push on behalf of Dr. Shepard to have a Guidance Center established at NCCN.

Securing the establishment of a VA Guidance Center at NCCN would provide the African-American veterans in the Durham area with easier access to the VA. While there is no evidence of wrongdoing on the VA’s behalf in the case of NCCN, it was an organization that employed very few African-Americans during the 1940’s. For example, Georgia and Alabama VA offices only employed twelve African-American counselors.⁶⁴ The majority of African-Americans that did work for the VA, served as typists and stenographers; positions that had little interaction with veterans.⁶⁵ Perhaps conscious of this imbalance, Dr. Shepard used his contacts at the VA regional office to secure a job for an NCCN alumni and former veteran in early 1946.⁶⁶ Creating a Guidance Center, however, required much more time and patience. VA Fayetteville informed Shepard that “if the need for a Guidance Center to care for colored veterans

⁶¹ James Shepard to Frank Hines, April 11, 1945, folder 2, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

⁶² Frank Hines to James Shepard, April 11, 1945, folder 2, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Onkst., 519.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 520.

⁶⁶ James Shepard to C.P. Pate, January 4, 1946, folder 3, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

becomes apparent and necessary in Durham,” he would be contacted.⁶⁷ Shepard’s persistence, however, paid off. After nearly six months of bureaucratic wrangling, and more communication involving North Carolina Senator Clyde Roark Hoey and the VA’s Chief Administrator General Omar Bradley, the VA informed Dr. Shepard that they planned to open a Guidance Center at his school in July of 1946.⁶⁸ The center was fully financed and staffed by the VA. The only obligation of NCCN was to provide the office space.⁶⁹

As the educational provisions in the G.I. Bill grew in popularity, NCCN was unable to immediately accept and accommodate every veteran that sought enrollment. By the spring of 1946, NCCN was forced to establish a waiting list due to lack of boarding space. Similar situations in other schools created a nationwide trend. Colleges adapted to burgeoning enrollments by increasing faculties, but they had difficulty providing housing accommodations for both traditional students and veterans.⁷⁰ The fact that many veterans had spouses and families further complicated the situation. Buildings were expensive, and funding cutbacks during the war had taken a toll on endowments.⁷¹ To address the unforeseen predicament, Congress created a program that would provide colleges with military trailers and barracks that the war’s conclusion had rendered superfluous. The Veteran’s Educational Facilities Program (VEFP) was authorized on

⁶⁷ C.P. Pate to James Shepard, January 15, 1946, folder 3, “File #148 Veterans Administration, North Carolina Central University.

⁶⁸ E.C. Hemingway to James Shepard, July 6, 1946, folder 4, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ George N. Redd, “Present Status of Negro Higher and Professional Education: A Critical Summary,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, (Summer, 1948), 402.

⁷¹ James A. Atkins, “Negro Educational Institutions and the Veteran’s Educational Facilities Program,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, (Spring, 1948): 141-153. (accessed September 21, 2007).

August 6, 1946, just in time for the upcoming school year. Congress appropriated one hundred and ninety two million dollars to the Federal Works Agency in order to augment housing for the student-veterans.⁷²

Although the actual legislation authorizing funds for the VEFP had not reached fruition until the following summer of 1946, various arms of the Federal Works Agency had begun preparation for it earlier in the year. NCCN received a notice from the State of North Carolina, Division of Purchase and Contract in January that it would be eligible for federal housing aid.⁷³ The following month, Dr. Shepard was contacted by the Atlanta Public Housing Authority and was advised to select a building site and contact a local architect and civil engineer for measurement and estimate assistance.⁷⁴ Attached to the letter was a contract to be filled out and returned with housing estimates. The contract was returned four days later with a request for ten trailers and five expandable Quonset huts.⁷⁵ In addition to housing, the government provided surplus linens and furniture. A field rep from the US Office of Education telegraphed NCCN requesting numbers of married and single veterans that would be residing in surplus housing. The telegraph stated that the government would provide “steel cots, mattresses, pillows, pillow cases, sheets, blankets, comfort spreads and face towels.”⁷⁶ A return telegraph estimated that surplus materials would need to be provided fifteen married students and twenty-four

⁷² Ibid, 141.

⁷³ WZ Betts to North Carolina College for Negroes, January 10, 1946, folder 4, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

⁷⁴ John Broom to James Shepard, February 11, 1946, folder 4, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University.

⁷⁵ National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, *Contract for Federal Housing Aid*, February 15, 1946, folder 4, “File #148 Veterans Administration,” North Carolina Central University

⁷⁶ Telegraph from Allison Honeycutt to North Carolina College for Negroes, February 17, 1946, Ibid.

bachelors.⁷⁷ These estimates indicate that NCCN would receive surplus housing for forty-one veterans students.

A few days after receiving confirmation from Atlanta that NCCN's request had been approved, Dr. Shepard wrote back requesting that the entire aid package and contract be cancelled.⁷⁸ His reason for taking such a drastic measure was that the cost to light and heat the buildings would be too expensive for the school. Rather than uniformly raise the boarding fees, which were \$4.50 per semester, Dr. Shepard decided to cancel the entire project.⁷⁹ Canceling such a generous offer over the cost of electricity deserves some speculation. The Federal Works Agency was aware that many African-American colleges were always under more financial stress than all white institutions, and they were awarded a disproportionate amount of aid.⁸⁰ For example, "other colleges received an average of 17.4 square feet [per veteran], while the Negro colleges received 33.4 square feet of floor space. Surplus war buildings boosted by twenty-five percent the physical plant of the Negro colleges and continued to serve succeeding college generations."⁸¹

Despite this rare generosity, it was more cost-efficient for NCCN to not participate in the VEEP, which was successful for other African-American schools. West Virginia State University, for example, boasted a grant of surplus structures, furniture, and equipment to "accommodate 1800 students, of which 1000 are expected to be veterans."⁸²

⁷⁷ Telegraph from James Shepard to Allison Honeycutt, February 20, 1946, Ibid.

⁷⁸ James Shepard to John Broome, April 26, 1946, folder 4, "File #148 Veterans Administration," North Carolina Central University.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Olson, 75

⁸¹ Ibid., 75

⁸² "Editorials," *The Crisis*, August 1947, 231.

Brooklyn Macmillan recalled that there were never any trailers on campus, and married veterans lived in and around the neighborhoods surrounding the campus.⁸³ A detailed history of NCCU published in 1984 mentions that the college's administration and faculty helped many veterans find jobs in and around the local community.⁸⁴ Since NCCN had requested federal housing aid for only forty-one students, it is possible that the Dr. Shepard cancelled the order because it was cheaper to find accommodations for students through community networks.

Conclusion

It is clear that the World War II veterans whom sought educational opportunities at NCCN under the G.I. Bill of Rights were able to do so without being prejudiced against by the VA. While there is no written evidence of any wrongdoing on behalf of the VA, it is obvious that had it occurred, Dr. Shepard had the ability to command the attention of elected officials and bureaucrats at the highest levels of the federal government. Shepard's life stands as testament to the fact that prior to the Civil Rights movement, African-American leaders thrived in roles that helped to create educational opportunities for others.

⁸³ Interview with Brooklyn Macmillan.

⁸⁴ Earl E. Thorpe, *A Concise History of North Carolina Central University*, (Durham: Harrington Publication, 1984), 70.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

MacMillan, Brooklyn. Interviewed by Erich Estilow at North Carolina Central University. 6 September 2007.

The interview with Mr. MacMillan lasted for about a half an hour. I actually did not need to ask him very many questions; he just opened up and discussed his memories of the war, and returning to school afterwards. We were kind of pressed for time because he had a lunch appointment. In retrospect, I wish I had inquired more about the Veteran's Club at NCCN.

New York Public Library Collections, *The Crisis*, Volumes 49-61.

In *The Crisis*, G.I. Bill veterans are mentioned frequently in the editorial sections of issues printed from 1945-49. These editorials contain information regarding enrollment levels, honor roll number, and federal aid. Also, there is limited information about G.I. Bill veterans to be found within advertisements for colleges.

North Carolina Central University Archives, File #148 "Veterans Administration, July 19, 1944-August 1, 1946," folders 1-4.

This archive has been divided up chronologically into four folders. The folders contain hand and typewritten letters, contracts, memos, and telegraphs between various government agencies and NCCN's president, Dr. Shepard. There are approximately 65-80 documents within File #148 that document a two-year period from 1944-1946.

North Carolina College for Negroes, *Student Handbook-1944-1945*.

This particular student handbook contains critical information pertaining to financial aid. It also contained demographical information that was useful.

Reel 6 of 8: *Papers of the NAACP. Part 9: Discrimination in the Armed Forces. Series A*, University Publications of America, Frederick, Maryland.

These papers detail the NAACP's interest in the G.I. Bill as it was being formulated in Congress. The reel contains correspondence between NAACP offices in Washington and New York.

Roosevelt, Franklin. "On Progress of War, and Plans of Peace." *Fireside Chats*.
www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/fires90html.

This website has all of Franklin Roosevelt's *Fireside Chats* chronologically ordered in text. I was able to find out about this specific address in the endnotes of Keith Olson's *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*.

Secondary Sources

Atkins, James A. "Negro Educational Institutions and the Veterans' Educational Facilities Program." *The Journal of Negro Education* (Spring, 1948): 141-153. (accessed September 10, 2007).

This is a detailed journal article that concludes the VEFP was beneficial for African-American colleges and universities. It contains some statistical analysis that demonstrates the amount of VEFP aid African-American schools received compared to all white schools.

Clement, Rufus E. "Problems of Demobilization and Rehabilitation of the Negro Soldier After World Wars I and II." *The Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1943): 533-542. www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 10, 2007)

This article was written well before the end of World War II, and it focuses on the failure of the U.S. government in compensating African-American World War I veterans. Clement theorizes that African-American veterans were treated even worse than white veterans due to racism and segregated veteran's facilities.

Dickenson, Paul, and Thomas B. Allen. *The Bonus Army: An American Epic*. New York: Walker and Company, 2004.

Dickenson and Allen's book draws on a plethora of primary source material to construct a narrative of the events leading up to the orders to disperse the Bonus Army. To accompany the text, there are some fantastic photographs of Bonus Army men and families camped on the banks of the Anacostia River.

Faggett, Harry L. "The Shepard Tradition." *The Journal of Negro Education* (Autumn, 1949): 484-488. www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 10, 2007).

This article examines the controversy over James E. Shepard's legacy among African-American leaders. Unfortunately, there are very few academic works written about Dr. Shepard. This article generally views Shepard in a positive light, asserting that critics fail to realize that some of his views were carried over from the Victorian era.

Harris, Nelson H. "Negro Higher and Professional Education in North Carolina" *The Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1948): 335-340. www.jstor.org/ (accessed September 10, 2007)

Nelson describes every African-American institution of higher education in North Carolina, both public and private. He compares enrollment levels of these schools to the white colleges.

Harris, Nelson H. "The Education of Negroes in North Carolina." *The Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1947): 387-396. (accessed September 10, 2007)

This article relies on financial data collected by the state of North Carolina in order to figure out expenditures on the spectrum of African-American schools- from elementary to university. Nelson documents that spending compared to white schools is unequal, however, he notes that the number African-American secondary school graduates had significantly risen since the 1920's.

King, Spencer Bidwell. *Selective Service in North Carolina in World War II*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949.

In this book, Bidwell compiles an immense amount of quantitative data, which he uses to analyze North Carolina's manpower contributions to World War II. The book details the interaction between the federal and state governments in order to formulate draft boards within North Carolina.

Lisio, Donald J. *The President and Protest: Hoover, MacArthur, and the Bonus Riot*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1994.

This book details the fiscally conservative political atmosphere that prevailed in the White House throughout the 1920's and into the 1930's. It was useful for the background section of my thesis.

Mettler, Suzanne. *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*. London: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Mettler's thesis maintains that the G.I. Bill gave its users a greater sense of civic responsibility throughout their careers and lives. In the case of African-American recipients, Mettler connects G.I. Bill use to the Civil Rights movement.

Olson, Keith B. *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1974.

Although this book was published long before G.I. Bill recipients actually retired, it provides a good overview of the G.I. Bill's formulation in the Roosevelt Administration and Congress. It largely focuses on white universities, particularly large state schools that adjusted to large population of veterans.

Onkst, David H. "First a Negro...Incidentally a Veteran: Black World War II Veterans and the G.I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948" *Journal of Social History* (Spring, 1998): 517-543. www.jstor.org/ (accessed April 2, 2007).

In this article, Onkst challenges traditional assumptions and perspectives of the G.I. Bill. His primary sources include interviews of former Southern Regional Council agents that inspected VA and USES offices throughout Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Onkst concludes that government failed African-American veterans by allowing Jim Crow laws to penetrate federal bureaucracies.

Redd, George N. "Present Status of Negro Higher Education and Professional Education: A Critical Summary" *The Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1948): 400-409. (accessed September 10, 2007).

This essay studies the increasing demand for higher education among African-Americans. Redd reasons that the increased demand for college following in the postwar years gave African-American colleges the financial freedom to strengthen curriculums.

Reid, George W. "James E. Shepard and the Public Record of the Founding of North Carolina College at Durham 1909-1948" *Negro History Bulletin*: (November-December, 1978).

This essay is a biographical sketch of James Shepard, detailing his personal educational achievements, and his creation of NCCU.

Ross, Davis R.B. Review of *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges*, by Keith Olson, *The Journal of American History*, December 1974, 840-841. www.jstor.org/ accessed February 2, 2007.

This is a short review of a cited text that was helpful for the historiography section of my thesis.

Ross, Davis R.B. *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

The first book to examine the G.I. Bill, *Preparing for Ulysses* concentrates largely on the political dynamics between the Roosevelt administration and Congress. The majority of the book concentrates on the formulation of the G.I. Bill from 1942-1943.

Thorpe, Earl E. *A Concise History of North Carolina Central University*, Durham: Harrington Publication, 1984.

The archivist at NCCU let me use this source during my visit. The section that described NCCU during and immediately after World War II was helpful.

Tyson, Timothy B. "Wars for Democracy: African-American Militancy and Interracial Violence in North Carolina during World War II." *In Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, edited by David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson et al. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

This essay was critical in helping me give some context to my thesis. The essay details the 1944 riot in Durham, in which started after a white bus driver murdered an African-American passenger.