Promises and Paychecks

How postwar policies shaped everyday life

USH.C.5.4.C "Describe the goals and effects of the G.I. Bill of Rights and Truman's "Fair Deal" on the average citizen."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one goal of the G.I. Bill and one goal of the Fair Deal. Circle two effects on people's lives, then number two limits that kept promised help from reaching everyone.

Two Paths to Postwar Security

1 When World War II ended, millions of service members returned to civilian life. Congress had passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, known as the G.I. Bill, in 1944 to help them make that shift and prevent widespread unemployment. Eligible veterans could receive money for college or job training, temporary unemployment payments, and government-backed loans for homes, farms, or businesses. A veteran learning to repair engines might gain a new career; another might buy a home with a loan requiring less money up front. These benefits helped many families build financial security and increased college enrollment and homeownership after the war.

2 Yet a benefit written into law was not always a benefit people could use. The G.I. Bill was open to eligible veterans regardless of race, but racial discrimination limited its reach. Many colleges refused to admit Black applicants, and lenders and sellers often shut Black veterans out of desirable neighborhoods. A veteran denied a mortgage or a seat in a classroom could not gain the same wealth or training as a veteran welcomed there. Women veterans were eligible too, but their smaller numbers and barriers in education and work meant the bill's gains did not reach every group equally.

3 President Harry Truman proposed the Fair Deal to extend economic security beyond veterans. He called for national health insurance, stronger civil rights protections, more housing, higher minimum wages, and broader Social Security coverage. Congress did not approve every proposal: national health insurance failed, and major civil rights bills stalled. But a 1949 law raised the federal minimum wage, a 1949 housing law supported public housing, and a 1950 law expanded Social Security coverage and benefits. For an eligible worker, higher pay or a retirement benefit could ease household pressure. Unlike the G.I. Bill, the Fair Deal aimed to help civilians broadly, though results depended on which plans became law.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What problem was the G.I. Bill meant to address, and how could one of its benefits change a veteran's life?

2. Why did the G.I. Bill produce unequal results for veterans, even though eligible veterans could receive its benefits regardless of race?

3. Choose one Fair Deal measure that became law. How could it affect an ordinary person's financial security?

4. What Fair Deal goal was not achieved, and what does that reveal about the difference between a policy's goal and its effect?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent two neighbors in 1951, one eligible veteran and one civilian who did not serve. In four to five sentences, show how a G.I. Bill benefit and an enacted Fair Deal measure might change their daily lives, and include one limit that keeps either policy from helping someone fully.

ANSWER KEY

Promises and Paychecks

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.5.4.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one goal of the G.I. Bill and one goal of the Fair Deal. Circle two effects on people's lives, then number two limits that kept promised help from reaching everyone. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What problem was the G.I. Bill meant to address, and how could one of its benefits change a veteran's life?	**It aimed to help returning service members adjust and prevent widespread unemployment. Education or training money could help a veteran prepare for a new career.**
2	Why did the G.I. Bill produce unequal results for veterans, even though eligible veterans could receive its benefits regardless of race?	**Discrimination by colleges, lenders, and sellers kept many Black veterans from using education and housing benefits on equal terms.**
3	Choose one Fair Deal measure that became law. How could it affect an ordinary person's financial security?	**The higher federal minimum wage could increase pay for a covered worker. Accept the housing law or expanded Social Security coverage and benefits with a matching effect.**
4	What Fair Deal goal was not achieved, and what does that reveal about the difference between a policy's goal and its effect?	**National health insurance did not become law, so that proposed help did not reach people. A policy goal does not have an effect simply because a president proposes it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1951, veteran Elena uses a G.I. Bill loan guarantee to buy a small house near the bus line, so her family no longer moves each year. Her neighbor Ruth, who did not serve, earns more at a factory covered by the federal minimum wage because the wage rose, and she can put a little money aside. Ruth still struggles to pay a doctor's bill because Truman's national health insurance proposal did not become law. Their experiences show that enacted benefits could help households in different ways, but the Fair Deal did not deliver everything Truman sought.

Accept other accurate links between a stated goal, an enacted benefit, and its effect on a household. Distinguish Fair Deal proposals that failed from measures that became law.