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Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation

Suzanne Mettler

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The G.I. Bill fueled not only the development of the middle class: it also revitalized American democracy. Americans who came of age during World War II joined fraternal groups and neighborhood and community organizations and took part in politics at rates that made the postwar era the twentieth century's civic "golden age." Drawing on extensive interviews and surveys with hundreds of members of the "greatest generation," Suzanne Mettler finds that by treating veterans as first-class citizens and in granting advanced education, the Bill inspired them to become the active participants thanks to whom memberships in civic organizations soared and levels of political activity peaked. Mettler probes how this landmark law produced such a civic renaissance. Most fundamentally, she discovers, it communicated to veterans that government was for and about people like them, and they responded in turn. In our current age of rising inequality and declining civic engagement, *Soldiers to Citizens* offers critical lessons about how public programs can make a difference.

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