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Stephen R. Ortiz. *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era.* New York: New York University Press, 2010. xii + 249 pp. $47.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-6213-4.

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War Veterans as Central Actors in New Deal Politics

At the end of World War I in 1918, a staggering 4.7 million veterans faced a severe crisis. Many struggled to find jobs, pay their bills, and receive necessary medical attention. While the federal government established an administrative apparatus to attend to veterans' needs, many veterans felt that these programs were weak. Episodes such as the Bonus March in 1932–when forty thousand protestors marched on Washington and demanded instant payment of their bonus–typified veterans' level of discontent with federal policy. Twenty years later at the end of another world war in 1945, sixteen million war veterans experienced a decidedly different political climate. The landmark GI Bill offered veterans money for education, housing, and small-business loans. This sharp contrast in federal veteran policy between World War I and World War II marked a sea change. Mining through newspapers, periodicals, archival documents, and government sources, Stephen Ortiz's *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* chronicles this important shift, illuminating how veterans and veteran organizations pushed the federal government to place their interests front and center on the national agenda.

Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill is an ambitious and nuanced study of the ways that veteran politics influenced federal policy during the 1930s and 1940s. Avoiding the impulse to focus on the most dramatic and well-documented episodes in veteran political history during the interwar years, including the Bonus March and the GI Bill, Ortiz instead traces the history of organized veteran politics, examining the dynamic, triangulated inner workings of veteran organizations, veteran policies, and American political culture. Ortiz ably demonstrates that veterans participated in an active political life, following the publicized Bonus March as they staged smaller marches, lobbied politicians, and threatened to undermine President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) prospects for reelection in 1936.

Ortiz positions war veterans as central actors in New Deal politics. He argues that federal veteran policies, such as the bonus and pensions, lend "insight into the era's changing relationship between citizens and the federal government, a process normally associated with New Deal labor, social welfare, and relief programs." He contends that the "inclusion of veteran politics does not just supplement the New Deal narrative, it alters it" (p. 8). Ortiz successfully defends this claim, illuminating the ways that veterans' lobbying through the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion during the 1930s led to their inclusion into American federal programs, typified by the GI Bill of 1944, and, most recently, the GI Bill of 2008.

Ortiz's narrative will likely be a new one for most readers, including many scholars of American political history. During the interwar years, both Republican and Democratic presidents opposed veteran benefits precisely they viewed them as "a continued pocket of governmental waste and corruption, contrary to the tenets of fiscal conservatism that they all held dear" (p. 5). While countless historians have documented the ways that FDR and New Deal programs put thousands of Americans to work and rebuilt the nation's infrastructure, few have acknowledged FDR's veto of veterans' bills and even mockery of veterans themselves. In 1933, during the "First Hundred Days," FDR signed the "Bill to Maintain the Credit of the United States," which cut veterans' pensions and benefits by 460 million dollars, thereby politicizing veterans to fight for inclusion in federal programs.

Ortiz demonstrates how federal policy–and, by extension, American political culture–underwent a fundamental shift to embrace the needs of veterans by furnishing them with health care benefits, pensions, job training programs, education, and housing. But it was not a foregone conclusion that American political culture would

make this shift. Rather, Ortiz demonstrates that it was only through veterans' lobbying of Congress that they were able to wield influence to push the federal government to embrace these socially democratic policies. In turn, presidents have since begun to acknowledge the power of this "veterans' vote" by crafting policies and legislation that would appeal to this core constituency.

In examining the American politics through the lens of veterans' organizations, Ortiz recasts several episodes. For instance, he shows how the Bonus Army Expedition (BAE) was deeply connected to veterans' organizational rivalries. The two major veterans' organizations–the established American Legion and grassroots VFW–often held different ideological viewpoints. The VFW wholeheartedly endorsed the full cash bonus for soldiers immediately in 1929, while the American Legion rejected it. The VFW's support for the cash bonus contributed to their tremendous organizational growth between 1929 and 1932. Rather than seeing the BAE as a spontaneous movement, Ortiz demonstrates that many veterans who participated had been politicized through their involvement in the VFW. "When the largest of the veteran organizations, the American Legion, failed to challenge federal policy," Ortiz writes, "veterans first flowed into the VFW and then into the streets of the capital" (p. 10). Ortiz's attention to the process of organizing helps to contextualize this vast mobilization of veterans in 1932.

Ortiz also sheds new light on the origins of the Second New Deal and Roosevelt's reelection in 1936. In 1935, veterans entered into an alliance with Roosevelt's chief critics, Father Charles Coughlin and Huey P. Long, in demanding that the government pay their bonus. FDR boldly responded with a presidential veto, using it as a springboard to launch the second New Deal, which created the Social Security and the National Labor Relations Acts. But despite FDR's veto, Congress passed the Bonus Act in 1936, which prompted veterans to spend money, thereby infusing millions of dollars into the economy. Ortiz argues that the Bonus Bill "may well have been the most successful piece of 'second' New Deal legislation" because it both improved the nation's economy as well as caused the political alliance between veterans, Coughlin, and Long to decline (p. 11). Both of these factors–an improved economy and weakened power of a third-party challenger–were deeply important for FDR's reelection in 1936.

Ortiz situates this book within the new and growing field of "policy history," which "offers an opportunity to reconcile the division between a grassroots approach and a top-down one" (p. 4). Ortiz masterfully navigates between veteran organizations and politicians. But the voices of the veterans are often missing. Instead, Ortiz uses these organizations to speak for veterans and thereby leaves the reader with the perspective that veterans' interests were often monolithic. Additionally, Ortiz does not discuss any coalitions between the labor movement and the veterans' movement, which would have added additional richness about the significance of veterans as political actors. Finally, besides noting the existence of the "thorny issue of race" in veterans' organizations, Ortiz does not discuss the racial implications of veteran policy (p. 19). Focusing specifically on African American veterans reveals significantly less change and more continuity between the 1920s and 1940s in federal veteran policy because fewer African American men were able to benefit from low-interest mortgages, attend college, or qualify for a loan to start a business. A critique of the racial politics of these policies would have been an important contribution to this book.

But Ortiz should be commended for his painstaking attention to the process of politics, effectively illuminating the ways that legislation and policymaking were forces of politicization for veterans. As he writes, "federal policies aimed at benefiting veterans instead transformed them into activist citizens" and he successfully demonstrates that point (p. 10). The book is well written and neatly organized. And Ortiz is skilled at visual and textual analysis, especially with political cartoons. This book will be an indispensable contribution for scholars of the New Deal era, policy history, and American political history. *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill* succeeds in offering an entirely new dimension of American political history during the New Deal era, which is a considerable feat.

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