

EXPLAINER: THE RESCISSION ACT



THE FILIPINO VETERANS RECOGNITION
AND EDUCATION PROJECT

TEACHER BACKGROUND

At the end of World War II, after years of high government spending to support the war effort, Congress was looking for ways to trim the U.S. budget. In 1946, a “rescission” bill, to rescind or cut funds that had previously been appropriated, was introduced; if passed, it would cut or save the U.S. about \$52 billion. Among the costs that budget-conscious Congressmen identified were veterans benefits for Filipinos who had served in the U.S. armed forces during the war. An October 1945 report from the Veterans Administration estimated that the lifetime cost of benefits for Filipinos would be about \$3.2 billion.

At the same time, the U.S. was set to fulfill the promise of the Tydings-McDuffie Act and finally grant independence to the Philippines. In a solemn ceremony on July 4, 1946, the U.S. flag was lowered and the Philippine Republic’s flag was raised in Manila’s main square. Despite wartime orders from President Roosevelt and General MacArthur making clear that Filipinos who fought for the U.S. were full members of the U.S. armed forces, members of Congress argued that the Philippines now had responsibility for caring for Filipino veterans. To help them do so, Congress added a rider to the rescission bill. It provided a one-time \$200 million-dollar payment to the Philippines government to help them provide veterans care. It also stated that Filipinos who served in the U.S. military during the war would henceforth not be considered veterans, and therefore not entitled to any veterans benefits from the United States government.

The confluence of these two events, post-war cost-cutting measures and the declaration of an independent Philippines, was disastrous for Filipino veterans. The 1946 Rescission Act declared that they alone, of all people who had served in the U.S. military during World War II, would be denied veterans benefits.

Compare Filipino veterans’ situation to that of other World War II veterans. Passed unanimously in Congress and signed by FDR in 1944, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, better known as the GI Bill, provided tuition, cost-of-living, books and supplies, equipment and counseling services for veterans to continue their education. It provided government-backed loans so returning veterans could purchase homes. The bill also ensured that veterans’ hospitalization needs would be taken care of. Approximately 8 million veterans received educational benefits over the next seven years, costing about \$14.5 billion. By 1955, 4.3 million home loans had been granted, with a face value of \$33 billion. The bill also appropriated half a billion dollars for the construction of new veterans hospitals.

Filipino veterans were denied another major benefit, too. In 1940, as the U.S. looked ahead to a possible second world war, Congress had passed the Nationality Act. The law clarified who was

eligible for birthright citizenship and outlined the process by which immigrants could become naturalized as U.S. citizens. It specifically stated that foreigners, “including a native-born Filipino,” who had served honorably in the U.S. military could become U.S. citizens. During World War II, servicemembers from more than 60 countries around the world served under the U.S. flag, including 200,000 Filipinos. The terms of the Rescission Act prevented Filipino veterans from being able to pursue U.S. citizenship if they wanted to. (Not helping matters: The U.S. also closed its Immigration & Naturalization Services offices in the Philippines after the handover.)

The Philippines government rejected the offer. Diplomat Carlos P. Romulo testified before the United States Congress in 1948, saying:

The Rescission Act deprives Filipino veterans of veterans’ benefits, with the proviso that \$200 million be appropriated to the Army of the Philippines. These \$200 million, which are purportedly in lieu of the benefits of which Filipino veterans were thus deprived, are actually not even sufficient to cover their back pay. The Philippine Government has chosen not to accept the appropriation.

The Rescission Act kicked off a 75-year effort by Filipino veterans and their advocates to gain justice. They sought the veterans benefits and healthcare they had earned and, for those that wanted it, the opportunity to obtain citizenship. Filipino veterans also wanted the U.S. to acknowledge the injustice that had been done by the passage of the Rescission Act and lobbied for it to be repealed.

SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES

- › In a U.S. history curriculum, the Rescission Act can be part of a lesson looking at demilitarization at the end of World War II, comparing and contrasting its terms with that of the GI Bill. Share “by the numbers” information provided in the Teacher Background and ask students to assess whether U.S. justifications for the Rescission Act are credible.
- › In a world history curriculum, it can be used as part of a unit looking at decolonization after World War II, comparing the process by which the Philippines gained independence to other colonized nations. Emphasize how colonizing powers did or did not maintain ties and fulfill promises to its former colonies after independence.
- › In either a U.S. or world history curriculum, it can be taught as part of a lesson looking at how the U.S. established its military and diplomatic interests at the dawn of the Cold War, including in its former colony of the Philippines. Focus on Filipinos’ expectations and the decision to reject the Rescission Act appropriation by Philippine diplomats.
- › Ask students to assess the degree to which xenophobia and racism may have played a part in the Rescission Act, even if leaders didn’t explicitly state so. A key point to emphasize is that, with the stroke of a pen, 200,000 Filipinos lost their eligibility to immigrate to the U.S., a situation that would not change until after the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act.



CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Common Core: Middle School

- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Common Core: High School

- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

THE RESCISSION ACT, 1946 (EXCERPT)

At the end of World War II, after years of high government spending to support the war effort, Congress was looking for ways to trim the U.S. budget. Among the costs that budget-conscious Congressmen identified were veterans benefits for Filipinos who had served in the U.S. armed forces during the war. Using the justification that the Philippines were now an independent country, the United States passed a Rescission Act that provided a one-time payment to the Philippines government to care for veterans, while stating that henceforth, Filipinos who had served in USAFFE under the U.S. flag were not entitled to benefits from the U.S. government.



Army of the Philippines, \$200,000,000; Provided, That service in the organized military forces of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines, while such forces were in the service of the armed forces of the United States pursuant to the military order of the President of the United States dated July 26, 1941, shall not be deemed to be or to have been service in the military or naval forces of the United States or any component thereof for the purposes of any law of the United States conferring rights, privileges, or benefits upon any person by reason of the service of such person or the service of any other person in the military or naval forces of the United States or any component thereof, except benefits under (1) the National Service Life Insurance Act of 1940, as amended, under contracts heretofore entered into, and (2) laws administered by the Veterans Administration providing for the payment of pensions on account

of service-connected disability or death: Provided, further, That such pensions shall be paid at the rate of one Philippine peso for each dollar authorized to be paid under the laws providing for such pensions.



Source: Rescission Act of 1946, Pub. L. 79-301, H.R. 5158, 60 Stat. 6, enacted 18 February 1946.

Focus Question:

- › How did the Rescission Act affect Filipino veterans? What benefits were they denied because of the law?
- › What part of the Rescission Act made Filipino veterans ineligible to pursue citizenship?
- › What reasons did the U.S. use to justify the Rescission Act? Can you imagine any unstated reasons that could have motivated the U.S.'s decision?
- › The Philippine government rejected the \$200 million appropriated in the Rescission Act for veteran care. What do you think of this decision?