

Up from the Dust Part 2 & Part 3

Guiding Question: What actions did people take to cope with the economic hardship of the Great Depression?

Document Analysis

Text Analysis: Bonus Army Memoir

Read the following excerpt from W.W. Waters' memoir and answer the questions that follow.

In the following memoir, World War I veteran W.W. Waters recalls the high unemployment and low morale he witnessed on the streets of Portland, OR, during the first years of the Great Depression. Facing a similar situation himself, Waters was a founding member of the Bonus Expeditionary Force, a large group of veterans who marched from Oregon to Washington, DC, in the spring of 1932 demanding immediate payment of their war bonuses.

In my ceaseless beating about the city I found family after family in the same general condition or worse. I saw men half clad, in threadbare clothing, pacing the streets in soleless shoes. On their faces was the same look, part hope, part bewilderment, as they searched for a chance to earn a few dollars at honest work. I talked with hundreds of these men and found that, with few exceptions, they wanted not charity but work that would enable them to live and to regain their self-respect ...

These men had fallen far down into the valley of despair. Some push was necessary to start them out and up over the hill. Jobs would have provided the best sort of impetus but there were no jobs. The Bonus, a lump sum of money, could act in the same fashion. Debts could be met, doctors' bills paid, a fast fraying credit renewed, and one man could look another in the eye once more.

Source: Waters, W. W. & William C. White. 1933. *B.E.F. The Whole Story of the Bonus Army* (pp. 6–10). New York: The John Day Company. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001874081>

Word Bank

memoir (n) – a first-person historical account
low morale – lack of confidence or motivation
ceaseless (adj) – without end
threadbare (adj) – cloth that is thin and tattered with age

soleless (adj) – shoes with bottoms that are worn out
bewilderment – a feeling of being confused or lost
valley of despair – a place with no hope
impetus (n) – a force that makes something happen
Bonus (n) – a payment the US government promised to those who fought in WWI, that veterans were demanding
fraying (v) – wearing out

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Photograph Analysis: Hoovervilles

The images below capture Hoovervilles in the 1930s. Look closely at both images, read the descriptions, and then complete the chart that follows.

Seattle Hooverville

The Great Depression left millions of Americans unemployed. Some Americans and their families, unable to afford rents or mortgages on their homes, were forced to live on the streets. Massive encampments called “Hoovervilles”—named for President Hoover, whom many Americans blamed for the Depression—sprang up as temporary housing for the newly homeless. Seattle’s largest Hooverville (seen in this photograph from 1933) stretched over nine acres and consisted of hundreds of shacks without electricity or running water.



Homeless camp known as a “Hooverville,” foot of S. Atlantic St, ca. 1933, Seattle, Washington.

Source: University of Washington Libraries. Special Collections Division. Seattle Photograph Collection.
<http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/seattle/id/1167/rec/14>

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St. Louis, Missouri, Hooverville

Some of the Hoovervilles lasted for many years and created community-based services for the residents, including soup kitchens (as seen in this photo from 1932). Near this St. Louis Hooverville located along the Mississippi River, a local philanthropist [wealthy donor] helped set up a cooperative food distribution and canning center that supplied food for the needy and unemployed residents of the Hooverville.



Hooverville residents eat meals provided by a charity on Dec. 4, 1932. Fortunately for the 1,500 diners, it was a balmy 52 degrees that day. St. Louis, Missouri.

Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch photo archives
<https://www.stltoday.com/news/archives/>

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Note-Taking Tool: Photograph Analysis

After closely studying the images, jot down your observations about the following in the chart (be specific!).

Describe what you see (the buildings, the kinds of people).	What do you learn about Hooverilles by viewing the images?
What do you learn about Hooverilles by reading the captions?	What is the mood or feeling of the images? How is that communicated?

Discussion Questions

1. Based on Frank's and Ginny's experiences and your analysis of the images and memoir excerpt above, what conditions did ordinary Americans face during the early years of the Great Depression, and how did they respond? What strategies did they use?

2. How does the response of Americans in the 1930s compare to how you think Americans would respond to similar conditions today?