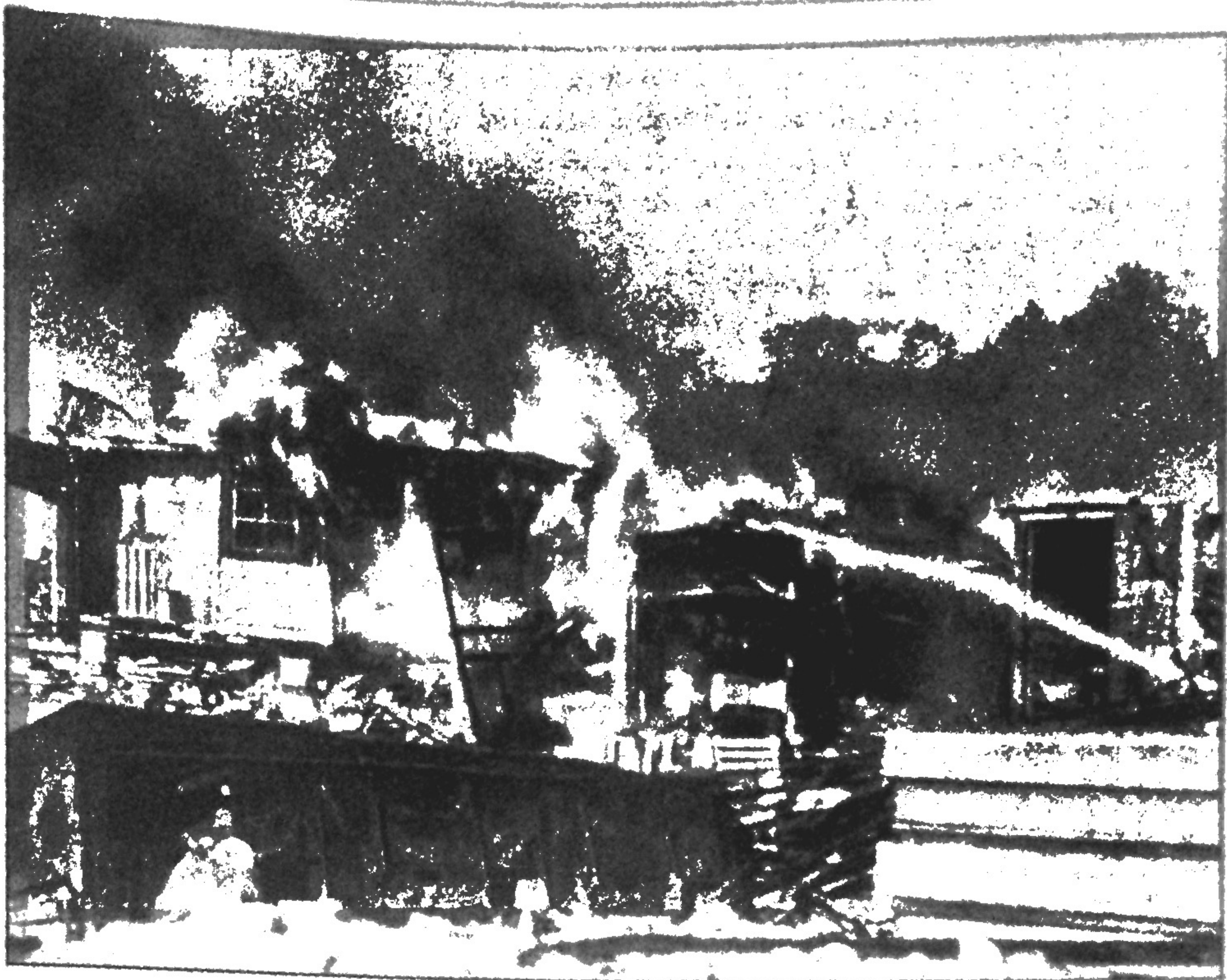


1932: Marching for Our Rights In the election year of 1932, two great protests demonstrated the potential of the Depression to mobilize people in defense of their rights in a society that they saw still governed by uncaring elites. By 1932, Henry Ford, America's most famous industrialist, had dumped 60,000 workers onto Detroit's relief rolls. On March 7, 1932, more than 3,000 protesters organized by the small, Communist-led Auto Workers' Union marched on Ford's giant River Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan. The "hunger marchers" demanded jobs for laid-off workers, a slowdown of the company's assembly line, and a halt to evictions of former Ford workers. As the marchers neared the factory gate, Dearborn police and Ford guards first threw tear gas and then fired their guns at the retreating crowd. Hundreds of shots rang out, killing four marchers and wounding more than sixty others. Within days, hundreds of suspected "Reds" had been arrested throughout the region in a police dragnet.

But Ford's reaction to the march only hardened the participants' determination to effect change. For Dave Moore, who began his political activity fighting evictions in Detroit, the Hunger March was "the turning point in

Anacostia Flats and Flames
The Bonus Marchers' shantytown burned down within sight of the Capitol on the afternoon of July 28, 1932. Federal troops had set fire to the camp after dispersing the unemployed and homeless World War I veterans who were asking for an early release of their war bonuses.
National Archives.



my life. . . . When I saw the blood flowing there on Miller Road, that was the point I became a radical." The following Sunday, an interracial crowd of more than 20,000 people followed the caskets of the slain men and listened to the strains of the "Internationale," the Communist anthem, as the caskets were lowered into the ground. Henry Ford, a hero of the 1920s, became a much-hated man in the city of Detroit.

Four months later, a veterans' march on Washington, D.C., had an even greater impact on the nation. After World War I, Congress had passed a bill promising each veteran a cash bonus to be paid in 1945. But the vets needed the money now, and in May 1932, a group of veterans from Portland, Oregon, set out for Washington to press their case. Twenty thousand ex-servicemen soon set up camp in the capital. But Congress balked as a sizable group of Bonus Marchers took over unoccupied government buildings. In late July, when Hoover evicted the protesters, police killed two veterans. Prodded by Army Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur, who considered the Bonus Army a "mob" driven by the "essence of revolution," Hoover called out the regular army, which launched a tank and cavalry assault on the Bonus Army encampment across the Anacostia River from the U.S. Capitol, burning down their temporary shelters. Millions of citizens were horrified by the image, reproduced in newspapers and on newsreels, of a battle-ready army driving off a ragtag collection of men who had faithfully served their country and were now desperately seeking help. "So all the misery and suffering had finally come to this," reported journalist Thomas Stokes, who

witnessed the assault, "soldiers marching with their guns against American citizens." Hoover's reputation, like Henry Ford's, collapsed.

Although these conflicts with police and sheriffs, as well as the demonstrations by the unemployed, did not succeed, they had lasting consequences. The stark confrontations of the early 1930s helped to radicalize thousands of impoverished men and women, who later built potent industrial unions and political organizations that played a leading role in transforming the economic status and social expectations of millions of Americans. And despite much heated rhetoric denouncing the government, these early Depression protests helped workers and farmers to turn their attention beyond their neighborhoods and employers and to demand help with their problems from the state. They wanted a "new deal" out of life, and they had the voice and votes to win it.

The Promise of a New Deal

Franklin Delano Roosevelt stands with Abraham Lincoln as a founder of the modern American nation. He was elected president four times and served for more than twelve years, longer than any chief executive in American history. During those years, the United States put in place the social legislation, economic regulations, and governmental apparatus that serves as the foundation for the powerful, politically energetic state that has been a prominent feature of American life ever since. In his inaugural address, Roosevelt responded to mass protests, asserting, "The nation calls for action and action now." Roosevelt did take immediate action with a wide array of programs—collectively known as "the New Deal"—that were designed to restore production and stability in banking, agriculture, and industry.

But Roosevelt was not a radical, nor were the overwhelming majority of his key appointees. Roosevelt drew much of the legislation that was put forward during the famous first hundred days of the New Deal from the program of the most conservative wing of the Democratic Party or from proposals that Herbert Hoover had failed to pass. Even as the government took on new responsibilities, Roosevelt sought to conserve as much of the nation's existing economic and social arrangements as possible. Mistrustful of labor radicals and worried that "the dole," as he referred to cash relief, undermined self-respect, Roosevelt courted business support and strove to balance the budget as soon as possible. And neither Roosevelt nor his principal advisers dared to challenge the power of the southern white landowning elites, especially on issues of race, or to question gender roles in framing emergency relief and social welfare legislation.

Franklin Roosevelt: Experimentation and the Status Quo Roosevelt was born in 1882 into a patrician New York family whose wealth, although