

atrical world extravagant productions were carried by a few second-rate stars, and so on up the scale into politics where it was difficult to interest good men in positions of the highest importance and responsibility, importance and responsibility far exceeding that of business executives but which paid only five or six thousand a year.

Now once more the belt is tight and we summon the proper expression of horror as we look back on our wasted youth. Sometimes, though, there is a ghostly rumble among the drums, an asthmatic whisper in the trombones that swings me back into the early twenties when we drank wood alcohol and every day in every way grew better and better, and there was the first abortive shortening of skirts, and girls all looked alike in sweater dresses, and people you didn't want to know said "Yes, we have no bananas" and it seemed only a question of a few years before the older people would step aside and let the world be run by those who saw things as they were—and it all seems so rosy and romantic to us who were young then, because we will never feel quite so intensely about our surroundings any more.

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One of best known songs of the Depression era was written by E. Y. ("Yip") Harburg, the son of Jewish immigrants from Russia who lived in the Lower East Side of New York City. Working with composer Jay Gorney, Harburg wrote "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" in 1932.

Yip Harburg, "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime" (1932)²

They used to tell me I was building a dream, and so I followed the mob,
When there was earth to plow or guns to bear, I was always there, right there on
the job.

They used to tell me I was building a dream, with peace and glory ahead.
Why should I be standing in line, just waiting for bread?

Once I built a railroad, made it run, made it race against time.
Once I built a railroad. Now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?
Once I built a tower, to the sun, brick, and rivet, and lime.
Once I built a tower, now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?

Once in khaki suits, gee, we looked swell,
Full of that Yankee Doodle-de-Dum.

Half a million boots went sloggin' through Hell,
And I was the kid with the drum.

Say, don't you remember, they called me Al.

It was Al all the time.

Say, don't you remember, I'm your pal!

Buddy, can you spare a dime?

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Returning soldiers from World War I had been issued a “bonus” in 1924, in the form of government bonds that would be paid out in 1945. But with the onset of the Depression, many veterans were hard hit. They were without jobs, and their families were going hungry. They began to organize, demanding immediate payment of the bonds. They gathered all over the country and came to Washington, with wives and children or alone, in broken-down autos, stealing rides on freight trains, hitchhiking. Twenty thousand came. They called themselves the “Bonus Expeditionary Force” or “The Bonus Army.” They set up camp across the Potomac River from the Capitol on Anacostia Flats. But Congress refused to act, and when the veterans remained in their encampment, President Herbert Hoover ordered the army to evict them. The officers in charge of the operation included Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, and George Patton. The veterans were attacked with tear gas and bayonets. Their tents were burned down. Here is a first-hand account of the Bonus Army march by Paul Anderson, a Missouri journalist who was an organizer of the American Newspaper Guild and had come to national prominence through his coverage of the East St. Louis massacre.

Paul Y. Anderson, “Tear-Gas, Bayonets, and Votes” (August 17, 1932)³

Hoover's campaign for reelection was launched Thursday, July 28, at Pennsylvania Avenue and Third Street, with four troops of cavalry, four companies of infantry, a mounted machine-gun squadron, six whippet tanks, 300 city policemen and a squad of Secret Service men and Treasury agents. Among the results immediately achieved were the following:

Two veterans of the World War shot to death; one eleven-weeks-old baby in a grave condition from gas, shock, and exposure; one eight-year-old boy partially blinded by gas; two policemen's skulls fractured; one bystander shot through the shoulder; one veteran's ear severed with a cavalry saber; one veteran stabbed in