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**GREAT WAR, FLAWED PEACE,  
AND THE LASTING LEGACY  
OF WORLD WAR I**

★



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# THE BONUS ARMY AND THE ELECTION OF 1932



**GUIDING QUESTION:** What impact did the Bonus March have on the election of 1932?

## AUTHOR

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## WHY?

In 1924, the U.S. government promised that World War I veterans would receive a bonus for their service in 1945. Just five years later, the Great Depression hit. In 1932, facing rising unemployment and low wages, over 10,000 World War I veterans marched to Washington D.C. to ask for their bonus payment early. On July 28, President Herbert Hoover ordered General Douglas MacArthur to remove the Bonus Army from the city. The actions of the U.S. Army caused injuries and deaths. The incident, along with Hoover's perceived inability to fix the economic depression, crippled his reelection campaign.

## OVERVIEW

Using primary and secondary sources, students will analyze primary and secondary sources to look at how the Bonus Army incident was handled.

## OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- › Explain the goals of the 1932 Bonus Marchers;
- › Consider conflicting perspectives on the riot; and
- › Analyze the ways that the Bonus March impacted veterans of subsequent conflicts.

## STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

### CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- › CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

## DOCUMENTS USED

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Broadside, Veteran's Rank and File Committee, "Veterans March to Washington," 1932

Library of Congress (rbpe1330190a)  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.1330190a/>

Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 1964 (excerpt)

Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends*, 1967 (excerpt)

Photograph, *Photograph of Bonus Marchers*, 1932  
National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-593253)  
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/593253>

Photograph, *Shacks, put up by the Bonus Army on the Anacostia flats, Washington, D.C., burning after the battle with the military. The Capitol in the background*, 1932

National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-97532)  
<https://www.archives.gov/global-pages/larger-image.html?i=/historical-docs/doc-content/images/bonus-army-fire-l.jpg&c=/historical-docs/doc-content/images/bonus-army-fire.caption.html>

Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Bonus Army stages huge demonstration at empty Capitol*, 1932  
Library of Congress (2016649901)  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016649901/>

Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Fingerprint experts check [sic] identity of veterans seeking tickets home*, July 9, 1932  
Library of Congress (2003675447)  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003675447/>

Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Members of the Bonus Army bathing in the Tidal Basin of the Potomac River*, June 6, 1932  
Library of Congress (2017648539)  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017648539/>

Photograph, *Vacated Bonus Army Camp*, 1932 or 1933  
Library of Congress (2017648539)  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2016889895/>

Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Veterans "bury" Republican leaders with Bonus hopes at camp*, 1932  
Library of Congress (96524547)  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/96524547/>

Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Western Bonus Army lays siege to Capitol, spend night on plaza lawns*, 1932  
Library of Congress (2017658680)  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3a00515/>

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Film, *The March of the Bonus Army*, 2006 (clips)  
PBS  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSC1lbfXfRQ>

## MATERIALS

- > Photograph Collection, Bonus Army in Washington, D.C
- > Photograph Collection, Removing the Bonus Army

## ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- > Project images or print copies of the photograph images.
- > Preview and set clips from the documentary film for students.

## PROCEDURE

### ACTIVITY ONE: DEMANDS OF THE BONUS MARCHERS (30 MINUTES)

- > Project (or distribute copies) the 1932 broadside "Veterans March to Washington."
- > Ask students:
  - » *Who is the audience of this broadside (poster)?*
  - » *What do the organizers want veterans to do?*
  - » *Define bonus (in context of World War I).*
  - » *What is the purpose of the bonus?*
  - » *Why would veterans want the bonus right away?*
  - » *How do you think veterans are going to get the bonus?*
- > Play *The March of the Bonus Army* (5:00-7:10) to help set the context and explain how and why the marchers came to Washington, D.C.

- > Project (or distribute copies) the Photograph Collection, Bonus Army in Washington, D.C. Allow students time to analyze the photograph. Ask students:
  - » *What are some potential problems that could arise from such a large movement?*
  - » *Which people or groups would support the Bonus Army? Which people or groups would oppose the Bonus Army?*
  - » *How do you think President Herbert Hoover reacted to the Bonus Army?*

### ACTIVITY TWO: RESPONSE TO THE BONUS MARCHERS (30 MINUTES)

- > Explain the following to the students:
  - » *On June 15, 1932, the U.S. House of Representatives voted on a bill to give the World War I veterans their bonuses earlier, but two days later, the U.S. Senate defeated the measure 62-18. President Hoover had threatened to veto the bill if passed, but the defeat in the Senate made that action unnecessary. Most of the marchers remained in Washington, demanding action.*
  - » *At the end of July, Congress was dismissed for the summer recess, and on July 28, 1932, Herbert Hoover ordered the Secretary of War to remove the protesters. Orders were given to General Douglas MacArthur, assisted by Dwight D. Eisenhower.*
- > Divide students into pairs. Give one student the excerpt from Douglas MacArthur and the other student the excerpt from Dwight D. Eisenhower.
- > Direct students to independently read the officer assigned to them and answer the comprehension questions.
- > Ask students to share with their partner how their officer felt they should handle the situation. Ask student pairs, *Which officer do you side with and why?* Allow students to share their responses with the class.
- > Play *The March of the Bonus Army* (16:10-19:54) to show U.S. government's response to the Bonus Army.
- > Project (or distribute copies) the Photograph Collection, Removing the Bonus Army from Washington, D.C. Allow students time to analyze the photograph. Ask students:
  - » *How do you think the public responded?*
  - » *What does this incident do to Hoover's chances of getting re-elected? Why?*

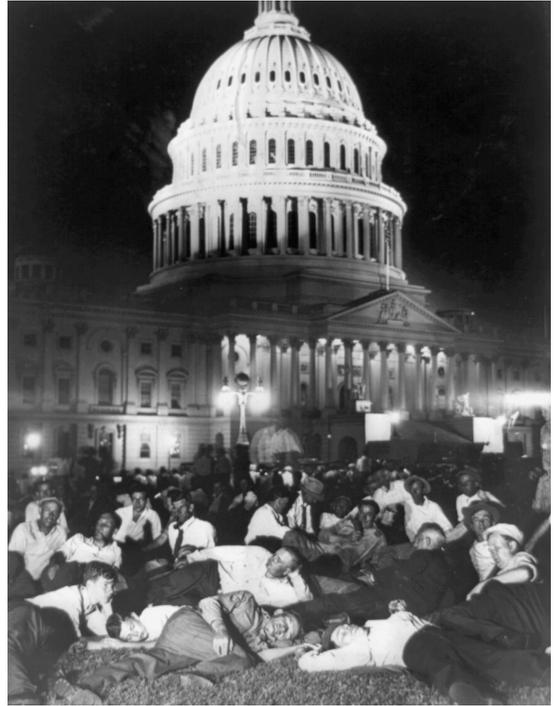
## ASSESSMENT

- › Lead a discussion to synthesize the experience of the Bonus Army. Questions can include:
  - » *Why was the government justified in not giving the veterans their bonus?*
  - » *Did the veterans deserve the bonus?*
  - » *How would giving the veterans the bonus benefit President Hoover?*
  - » *Why was the Bonus Army movement important?*
  - » *What would have happened if the veterans did not take action to receive their bonus?*
  - » *What would have happened if World War I veterans did not start the movement?*
  - » *After World War I what should the government have done to help veterans?*
  - » *What challenges did World War I veterans face when coming back home?*
  - » *Why would it be difficult for veterans to get a job after World War I?*
  - » *How will the Bonus Army incident affect the military in the future? What will happen to the amount of people who will enlist in the military in the future?*
  - » *How did the work of World War I veterans help future generations of the military?*

## METHODS FOR EXTENSION

- › Students with an interest in veterans issues and veterans rights can research Warren G. Harding's Executive Order 3669 (April 29, 1922) or the G.I. Bill (1944).
- › Students can read or listen to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Fireside Chat from July 28, 1943, and compare and contrast the experience of World War I and World War II veterans.

## PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION: BONUS ARMY IN WASHINGTON, D.C.



**Top Left:** Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Bonus Army stages huge demonstration at empty Capitol, 1932.* Library of Congress (2016649901).



**Middle Left:** Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Veterans "bury" Republican leaders with Bonus hopes at camp, 1932.* Library of Congress (96524547).

**Bottom Left:** Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Members of the Bonus Army bathing in the Tidal Basin of the Potomac River, June 6, 1932.* Library of Congress (2017648539).



**Right:** Photograph, Underwood & Underwood, *Western Bonus Army lays siege to Capitol, spend night on plaza lawns, 1932.* Library of Congress (2017658680).

## **DOUGLAS MACARTHUR, *REMINISCES*, 1964 (EXCERPT)**

“For two fruitless months the (bonus marchers) lived in absolute poverty making their daily marches to the Capitol Building, to the White House, and to all of the other federal buildings where they hoped to loosen the purse strings of government. In the end, their frustration, combined with careful needling by the Communists, turned them in an angry, riotous mob.

“Through the month of June the tension mounted...At night, ill-tempered men squatted by burning campfires listening silently to the endless speeches, always tinged with the increasing violence of Communist propaganda. The (bonus march) was actually far deeper and more dangerous than an effort to secure funds from a nearly depleted federal treasury. The American Communist Party planned a riot of such proportions that it was hoped the United States Army, in its efforts to maintain peace, would have to fire on the marchers. In this way, the Communists hoped to incite revolutionary action. Red organizers infiltrated the veteran groups and presently took command from their unwitting leaders.

“As the violence increased, Pelham Glassford . . . twice consulted with me about calling on the Army for assistance. Both times I advised against it. But on July 28th the crisis was reached. A mob of 5,000 strong began to move up Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Treasury Building and the White House. The police were outnumbered five to one. Glassford was mauled and stripped of his police superintendent's gold badge, gunfire broke out, two men were killed, and a score or more badly injured. It was evident that the situation had gotten beyond the control of the local authorities and a most power intervention was needed.”

What seems to be MacArthur's main concern?

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Who do you think MacArthur supported - the Bonus Marchers or the federal government? Why?

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How did MacArthur feel the situation should be handled?

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**DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, AT EASE: STORIES I TELL TO FRIENDS, 1967 (EXCERPT)**

“As quickly as the order was announced to us, General MacArthur decided that he should go into active command in the field...I told him that the matter could easily become a riot and I thought it highly inappropriate for the Chief of Staff of the Army to be involved in anything like a local or street-corner conflict. (Of course, this was no ‘street-corner’ matter -- but it still did not require the presence of the Chief of Staff in the streets).

“General MacArthur disagreed, saying that it was a question of Federal authority in the District of Columbia, and because of his belief that there was ‘incipient revolution in the air,’ as he called it, he paid no attention to my dissent. I was of the opinion that the Bonus Marchers should be paid for their service to our country.

“Instructions were received from the Secretary of War, who said he was speaking for the President, which forbade any troops to cross the bridge into the largest encampment of veterans, on the open ground beyond the bridge.

“These instructions were brought to the troop by Colonel Wright, Secretary of the General Staff, and then by General Mosely of the Assistant Secretary’s office. In neither instance did General MacArthur hear these instructions. He said he was too busy and did not want either himself or his staff bothered by people coming down and pretending to bring orders.”

What seems to be Eisenhower’s main concern?

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Who do you think Eisenhower supported - the Bonus Marchers or the federal government? Why?

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How did Eisenhower feel the situation should be handled?

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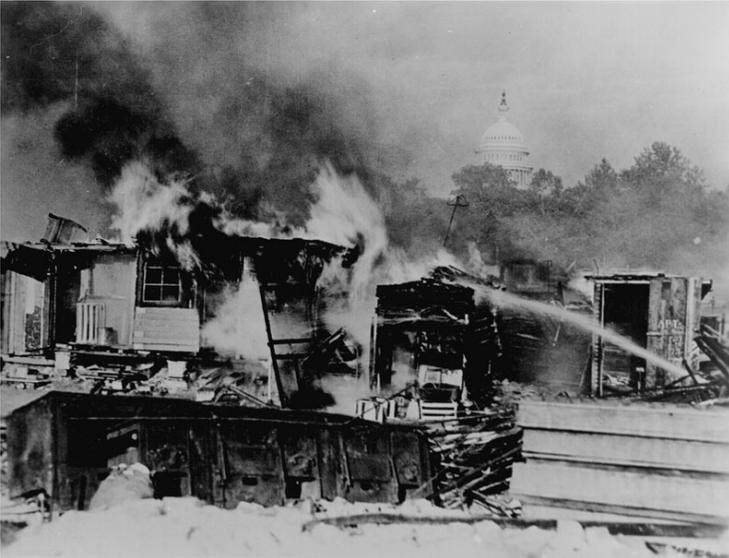
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## PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION: REMOVING THE BONUS ARMY FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.



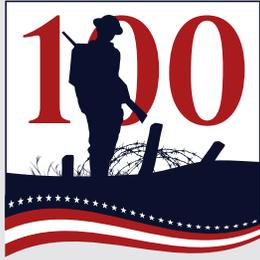
**Top Left:** Photograph, *Photograph of Bonus Marchers*, 1932. National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-593253).

**Middle Left:** Photograph, Shacks, put up by the Bonus Army on the Anacostia flats, Washington, D.C., burning after the battle with the military. The Capitol in the background, 1932. National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-97532).

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