

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 280

“A New Deal”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Out of every crisis, every tribulation, every disaster, mankind rises with some share of greater knowledge, of higher decency, of purer purpose. Today we shall have come through a period of loose thinking, descending morals, an era of selfishness, among individual men and women and among Nations. Blame not Governments alone for this. Blame ourselves in equal share. Let us be frank in acknowledgment of the truth that many amongst us have made obeisance to Mammon, that the profits of speculation, the easy road without toil, have lured us from the old barricades. To return to higher standards we must abandon the false prophets and seek new leaders of our own choosing...

I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people. Let us all here assembled constitute ourselves prophets of a new order of competence and of courage. This is more than a political campaign; it is a call to arms. Give me your help, not to win votes alone, but to win in this crusade to restore America to its own people.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, acceptance speech at the 1932 Democratic National Convention.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 280. A New Deal.

As we've proceeded through the history of the twentieth century, I've touched on each Olympic Games from 1900 forward. Most recently, I talked about the 1924 Olympics, which were held in Paris, back in episode 245.

I neglected to mention, however, that the first ever Winter Olympics was held in France that year, in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc in the French Alps. Sixteen nations competed in that first Winter Olympics: fourteen European nations plus Canada and the United States. Norway and Finland topped the medal rankings, with four gold medals each, although the Norwegians won more silver and bronze medals.

The 1924 Winter Olympics were treated as a part of the overall Olympic Games. This would change in 1928 and beyond. The Winter Olympics became their own distinct event, not necessarily held in the same host country as the Summer Olympics, although they would be held in the same year as the Summer Olympics until 1992. Two years later, the year 1994 would see

the beginning of the current practice of holding the Winter Olympics in the second year between the Summer Olympic Games.

Switzerland's St. Moritz would host the 1928 Winter Games, which would involve teams from 25 countries. Among the newcomers was Germany, allowed back into the Olympics for the first time since the war, also Japan, Mexico, and Argentina. Norway again led the medal totals, with the United States coming in second. The most notable athlete at the 1928 Winter Games was Norwegian figure skater Sonja Henie. Henie had competed in the 1924 Winter Games, when she was just eleven years old. She didn't score very well, but the plucky little girl became a fan favorite. In 1928, the now-15-year-old Henie took the gold in the women's singles competition, making her the youngest person ever to win an Olympic gold medal until 1994, when South Korean women's speed skater Kim Yun-Mi would win gold in the 3,000 meter relay at the age of 13.

The 1932 Olympic Winter Games were held in the United States; in and around the resort town of Lake Placid, New York. Eight nations that appeared in the 1928 Winter Olympics gave this one a miss, leaving just 17 competing nations. The host country won the most medals; by the way, this will be the first and only Winter Olympics of the twentieth century in which the United States leads the medal count.

The now-19-year-old Sonja Henie was among the athletes who came to Lake Placid, and she duplicated her 1928 feat, snagging her second gold medal in the women's singles figure skating competition.

Apart from Sonja Henie, the most famous name at the Lake Placid Winter Olympics was the Governor of New York, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who presided over the opening ceremonies on February 4, 1932. As you know from last week's episode, Roosevelt was by this time already regarded as the front-runner for the 1932 Democratic Party nomination for President.

His name had been under discussion ever since he bucked the Hoover tide of 1928 to become Governor. Even before Roosevelt's re-election as governor in 1930, Montana Senator Burton Wheeler, the Progressive Democrat who had been Fighting Bob LaFollette's Vice Presidential running mate on the 1924 Progressive Party ticket, declared his support for Roosevelt's nomination in 1932. So had Georgia's Democratic governor, L.G. Hardman. The time and money Roosevelt had invested in Warm Springs had made him something of an honorary Georgia native. He had gotten to know the Democratic leadership in Georgia, and through them the leadership of the neighboring states. These political connections would be valuable if Roosevelt didn't want to relive the political fate of fellow New Yorker Al Smith, who had never been accepted by the Party's powerful Southern wing.

Naturally, these early endorsements would have meant nothing unless Roosevelt got himself re-elected Governor in 1930, but he did, and that's where we ended last time. Roosevelt won handily and the Democrats took control of both houses of the state legislature. The day after the

election, Roosevelt's campaign manager, James Farley, told a press conference: "I do not see how Roosevelt can escape being the next presidential nominee of his party..." Roosevelt himself was coy about his position, saying, "I am giving no consideration or thought or time to anything except the duties of Governorship."

Let me remind you of what I said about the Great Crash back in episode 259. The year 1930 was a tough one in rural America, but the Northeast had been spared the worst. But December 1930, just after Roosevelt's reelection, the New York-based Bank of United States failed, triggering further bank failures across the US and demonstrating that New York was not immune to the economic crisis. By spring 1931, the unemployment rate was up to 15%. In New York, as in all American cities, people gathered in line in the cold for hours outside soup kitchens in the hope of getting a bowl of soup and a hunk of bread. The once-gainfully-employed stood on street corners selling apples. In trash dumps and railroad yards across the land grew communities of homeless people living in abandoned cars and makeshift shacks constructed out of packing crates. You can get a good, solid read on the political mood in America just by considering this one simple fact: throughout the length and breadth of the nation, wherever these pathetic, miserable shantytowns sprang up, people referred to them as "Hooverilles."

And how, you may wonder, was the namesake of those Hooverilles responding to the deepening economic crisis? On February 3, the day before the Winter Olympics opened in Lake Placid, President Hoover issued a statement in response to a growing call for the US Congress to meet in special session to consider relief programs for the unemployed and the hungry. Hoover's statement rejected any such program, proclaiming that "though the people support the Government, the Government should not support the people." Private charity was adequate to see to the needy, Hoover told the country, and a Federal relief program would only discourage private philanthropy in favor of a "disastrous" public system that would "not only impair[] something infinitely valuable in the life of the American people but [strike] at the roots of self-government."

It was impossible to miss the contrast between Hoover and Roosevelt, who was the most aggressive of the 48 state governors in pursuing new programs for Americans in poverty. In the summer of 1931, Roosevelt called the New York legislature into special session to ask for a \$20 million appropriation to provide jobs for the unemployed and food, clothing, and shelter to those who were suffering, and to establish a new state agency, the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, to oversee these programs, which would be funded by an increase in the state income tax.

To head the new agency, Roosevelt tapped Jesse Straus, head of the Macy's department store chain and a committed Democrat. Jesse Straus, by the way, was the eldest child of Isador and Ida Straus, who both died in the 1912 *Titanic* disaster, episode 64, when Isador refused to take a place in a lifeboat ahead of women and children, and Ida refused to leave her husband. Jesse Straus hired an Iowa-born social worker named Harry Hopkins to serve as executive director of

the new agency. Hopkins' excellent work in the position drew the attention of Governor Roosevelt, and Hopkins would become a key advisor and friend to both Franklin and Eleanor. Over the next six years, the new program would provide support to five million New Yorkers, about 40% of the state's population.

Speaking of Eleanor Roosevelt, despite her ambivalence when her husband was first elected governor in 1928, she came to appreciate being the first lady of New York. Most of the work of being governor could be done behind a desk, so Franklin was quite capable, despite his disability. The one aspect of the job that was difficult for him was traveling the state to make appearances, inspect state facilities, and preside at ribbon-cuttings and other such ceremonial occasions. So he sent Eleanor to make these personal appearances on his behalf, a job she clearly relished. She would report back to Franklin on her findings, and he would encourage state officials to regard his wife as essentially the co-governor.

Eleanor refused to accept a state car and driver when she traveled the state, preferring instead to drive herself. Franklin appointed a New York State Police sergeant named Earl Miller to travel with her and serve as her aide and bodyguard. The 34-year-old Miller had served in the Navy during the war, become the Navy's middleweight boxing champion, and been a member of the US Olympic team in 1920. The two became very close. Miller gave Eleanor lessons in swimming, diving, tennis, and riding and taught her how to shoot a pistol. He became virtually a member of the family and frequently stayed overnight at her home. He must have been quite a hunk, and he and Eleanor spent so much time together that it was rumored then and is rumored now that the relationship was a romantic one. Quite possibly it was, although if it was, the couple was careful to keep things very discreet.

In the early days of the podcast, I pointed out to you that as of the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States did not have a formally designated national anthem. There were a number of tunes that were played on patriotic occasions, but nothing official. But by the end of the 19th century, it had become custom on American Army posts to play "The Star-Spangled Banner" every evening. At the tail end of the 19th century, in 1899, the United States Navy adopted "The Star-Spangled Banner" and in 1916, Woodrow Wilson formalized the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at military occasions.

In 1918, "The Star-Spangled Banner" was played at a World Series game for the first time. And that same year, 1918, a bill was introduced into the US House of Representatives to make "The Star-Spangled Banner" the official national anthem of the United States. The bill was introduced by Maryland representative John Charles Linthicum.

The bill did not pass, and throughout the 1920s, Linthicum repeatedly introduced it, but it failed every time. In 1929, on this sixth attempt, he got the support of cartoonist Robert Ripley, who included in his syndicated cartoon, *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, a little blurb pointing out, "believe it or not, America has no national anthem." In 1930, the Veterans of Foreign Wars lined up

behind Linthicum's bill and circulated a petition, signed by five million, to make "The Star-Spangled Banner" the US national anthem.

The bill ran into a little trouble in Congress still, because a lot of people thought "The Star-Spangled Banner" was virtually unsingable. It is very challenging to sing. But those concerns were set aside, and in 1931, Congress passed the bill, and President Hoover signed it. Now at last, the United States has an officially designated national anthem.

[music: Smith & Key, "The Star-Spangled Banner.~"]

All this talk of Franklin Roosevelt as the 1932 Presidential nominee was deeply frustrating to Al Smith, the 1928 Democratic Presidential nominee and Roosevelt's predecessor as governor, who fully intended to run against Hoover again and was annoyed to hear all this buzz developing around his protégé instead of around him.

Smith and his political allies sought to stake his claim to the nomination early by proposing the Democratic National Committee adopt support for the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act and opposition to Prohibition as the two major planks in the 1932 Party platform, which echoed Smith's own positions. Apparently the idea was to put the Party on record behind the more conservative Smith. Smith apparently calculated that Roosevelt wouldn't dare oppose him publicly.

But the plan backfired. It is customary in American politics for political parties to set out their party platform at the nominating convention, and for the Democratic National Committee to seize this power before the delegates to the convention had even been selected went too far for many Democrats. Roosevelt's Democratic allies in the South and West, like Virginia Senator Harry Byrd, Tennessee Senator Cordell Hull, and Montana Senator Burton Wheeler, objected to the move as a power grab that would divide the Party when it needed unity to unseat Herbert Hoover. Roosevelt took up the call, declaring the DNC had overstepped its authority. He called the New York state Democratic committee into session to pass a resolution opposing the move; afterward Roosevelt and James Farley telephoned DNC members across the country to urge them to oppose the move as well, forcing Smith's allies to withdraw the proposal from the DNC agenda. Instead of weakening Roosevelt, the move had cemented his position as the leader of the Southern and Western wings of the Party. Roosevelt himself opposed the tariff and on the Prohibition question he was, in the parlance of the time, a "damp," meaning neither wet nor dry. He thought the issue should be decided at the state level.

Roosevelt spent the summer of 1931 at his house in Warm Springs, where he invited Southern Democrats to visit, and discovered they were solidly behind him. James Farley toured the country to talk with local Democratic committees and found strong support for Roosevelt wherever he went. One South Dakota Democrat put it simply: "I'm damned tired of backing losers."

Roosevelt's political opponents floated the idea that his health was too poor for him to be President. *Time* magazine picked up on this, declaring FDR "utterly unfit physically" for the office. Earle Looker, a Republican-leaning journalist for *Liberty* magazine challenged Roosevelt to a medical examination. Roosevelt accepted the challenge, and a panel of three doctors passed him with flying colors. Looker was invited to make an unannounced visit to Roosevelt's office and observe him at work. Looker took up the offer and was impressed with Roosevelt's enthusiasm and vigor. When his article for *Liberty* magazine was published, it declared the rumors false. James Farley sent reprints of the article to Democratic Party officials across the country, and Earle Looker would later become a speechwriter for Franklin Roosevelt.

Roosevelt made his candidacy official on January 23, 1932, the same day the Alaska Democratic Territorial Convention voted to send six Roosevelt delegates to the national convention. Roosevelt blew through the Democratic primaries, winning by lopsided margins, but in 1932, only 17 states chose their convention delegates in that manner. Remember too, that the Democratic Party required a two-thirds vote at the convention to nominate a candidate. It was a foregone conclusion that Roosevelt would come into the convention with a majority, but his opponents placed their hopes in denying him the full two-thirds. If Roosevelt couldn't win after several ballots, delegates would begin casting about for a compromise candidate.

In April, Roosevelt gave a nationwide ten-minute radio address on NBC's *Lucky Strike Hour*, which became famous for his evocation of the "forgotten man." He tore into the Hoover Administration's response to the Great Depression, saying Hoover "has sought temporary relief from the top down, rather than permanent relief from the bottom up. These unhappy times call for the building of plans that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid."

Meanwhile, the Republican National Convention met in June at the new Chicago Stadium in Chicago. The largest indoor arena in the world, it could seat 17,000, and every seat had an unobstructed view; moreover, it was the first air-conditioned arena ever built, a major consideration when you're talking about a summer convention. Perhaps that explains the cool and methodical Republican gathering that re-nominated Herbert Hoover for a second term as President with no fuss and no controversy. A handful of delegates cast protest votes for other candidates, former President Calvin Coolidge among them, but Hoover won on the first ballot with a comfortable 98% of the delegate vote.

The Democrats held their convention two weeks later, in the same venue, Chicago Stadium. The fact that the stadium was air conditioned was actually a cause for concern among Democratic Party leaders. A more comfortable arena might mean a convention more comfortable with taking its time across multiple ballots, and if Roosevelt failed to win the nomination in the first few votes, delegates would begin to drift toward other candidates. It had happened before.

Roosevelt came into the convention with the support of a solid majority of the delegates, which gave the Roosevelt campaign control over the platform committee and the election of the Party chair. The incumbent chairperson was a Smith supporter, but Roosevelt shrewdly chose Montana Senator Thomas Walsh, a Democratic hero for his investigation of the Teapot Dome scandal, and Walsh narrowly won the position.

Al Smith was well known for his opposition to Prohibition, and his people proposed that the Party platform include a call for full repeal of Prohibition. Once again, this was an attempt to drive a wedge between Roosevelt and his Southern and Western supporters, many of whom favored Prohibition. Roosevelt told his delegates they should vote their consciences on the Prohibition question; he would be comfortable running on whatever platform the Party chose.

In fact, Prohibition had become increasingly unpopular over the years. The St. Valentine's Day Massacre, which I told you about in episode 232, was surely a turning point, but there was more to it than that. It seems incontrovertible that the Great Depression undermined support for Prohibition. I'm tempted to insert a joke here about hard times driving people to drink, but this is no laughing matter. Maybe the American public was yearning for alcohol as an easy way to brighten up otherwise grim times. Maybe it was the simmering resentment of people denied the pleasures of drink themselves while the wealthy and powerful in America were still able to have their Canadian Club or their French champagne without fear of prosecution.

Opinion polling was in its infancy in 1932, but the magazine *Literary Digest*, famous for its Presidential polls, attempted to test the public mood and reported that a majority favored repeal. Even devout Baptist John D. Rockefeller, who had heavily funded the Prohibition drive had by 1932 changed his mind and declared that "the benefits of the Eighteenth Amendment are more than outweighed by the evils that have developed and flourished since its adoption." Within the Democratic Party, dry Democrats were losing primary challenges to a new generation of wet politicians. In the end, the convention voted overwhelmingly to endorse the full repeal of Prohibition. The Republican platform, by the way, had gone damp, calling for the decision to be made at the state level. So there were differences in the two platforms, but both major parties were now acknowledging that the existing Prohibition regime had to go.

Then it came time to consider the Presidential nomination. Roosevelt's name was put into nomination first. Roosevelt supporters cheered, while the stadium organist played "Anchors Aweigh," which was one of Roosevelt's favorite songs. Remember he was a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy and had a longstanding interest in naval matters. Only, Roosevelt's managers at the convention thought the song came across like a funeral dirge. One of them suggested a different piece of music, a popular tune from the 1929 Hollywood musical *Chasing Rainbows* that had a more upbeat tempo. The suggestion was communicated to the organist, who struck up "Happy Days Are Here Again." The convention went wild. "Happy Days Are Here Again" would become not only the Roosevelt campaign song, but would be associated with

Roosevelt, the New Deal, and the Democratic Party for decades to come. I would play it for you in today's podcast, but alas, it is still under copyright. But I bet most of you already know it.

The second nominee was the Democratic Speaker of the House of Representatives, Texas Congressman John Nance Garner. Garner had the support of the Texas delegation and the California delegation, which was led by William Gibbs McAdoo. We've met McAdoo before in the podcast. He had been Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of the Treasury as well as the President's son-in-law, and had made a Presidential bid of his own. Garner's nomination inspired the organist to provide renditions of "The Eyes of Texas" and "California, Here I Come."

The third nominee was Al Smith. The Party's 1928 candidate got a rousing cheer, even from many Roosevelt supporters. The organist played Smith's 1928 campaign song, "The Sidewalks of New York," a sentimental favorite for Democrats that brought tears to a few eyes.

But there was no sentimentality about the balloting. On the first round, with 770 needed to nominate, Roosevelt got 666, a solid majority, but short of the two-thirds needed. Smith came in a distant second with 202 votes, less than a third of Roosevelt's total. Garner was next in line with 90. Behind them were a number of favorite son candidates, hoping that a deadlocked convention would eventually turn to one of them. Among them was Virginia Senator Harry Byrd and Newton Baker, whom you will remember as Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of War.

Smith was not open to negotiation with the Roosevelt campaign. By this time, Smith felt bitter toward Roosevelt, the protégé who was now trying to steal the nomination Smith saw as rightfully his. If Smith couldn't have the nomination, he was determined Roosevelt wouldn't have it either. But John Nance Garner was another story. He was a distant third, but his 90 votes would just about plug the delegate gap Roosevelt's campaign needed to fill. They asked whether Garner would accept the vice presidential nomination in exchange for supporting Roosevelt for President. Garner's team wouldn't say yes or no; they told Roosevelt's team that their own delegates would not be willing to switch so soon, but if Roosevelt's commanding lead held up for a few more ballots, that would be a different story.

Two more ballots were conducted that night, while Roosevelt's people watched nervously for signs of slippage. In fact, it was Smith's support that slipped. Roosevelt gained twelve votes on the second ballot and five more on the third. Then the convention called it a night.

By the next morning, Garner was ready to accept the deal. On the fourth ballot, Roosevelt claimed 945 votes, taking the nomination by a comfortable margin, with only the Smith campaign holding out against him. Thomas Walsh recited the result to the convention, declared Roosevelt the nominee, and then made an additional, surprise announcement. Governor Roosevelt would be flying in from Albany tomorrow to accept the nomination in person at the convention.

Now in our time, it is standard practice for the nominee to give their acceptance speech at the convention, but in 1932 it was unprecedented. It was also remarkable for Roosevelt to travel by air. Passenger airline service existed in 1932, but it was far riskier than it is in our time. The airplanes of this time were by our standards flimsy and slow. They flew at a much lower altitude, making them much more vulnerable to the weather, and aircraft instruments were rudimentary. Pilots were heavily dependent on their own eyesight. Loss of visibility could easily result in a crash. Most Americans of 1932 would have still remembered the death of beloved Notre Dame football coach, the Norwegian-American Knute Rockne, who had died the previous year in the crash of a TWA passenger airliner that went down in a rainstorm after the water dissolved the glue that held together its plywood wing. And no, I am not making this up.

Roosevelt's willingness to buck tradition and appear at the convention sent a signal that he regarded the state of the nation as critical and was dedicated to urgent and rapid reform. His willingness to fly to Chicago signaled commitment and courage, helping to dispel concerns about his health and rebut claims that he was no more than a rich dilettante.

He appeared before the convention at 6:00 PM the day after his nomination. The organist again played "Happy Days Are Here Again," and the whole convention rose to their feet to welcome him. Roosevelt began his speech—which was carried live nationwide on the radio—by noting that his appearance here at the convention was unprecedented, but adding "but these are unprecedented times."

He went on: "I have started out on the tasks that lie ahead by breaking the absurd tradition that the candidate should remain in professed ignorance of what has happened until he is formally notified...Let it be from now on the task of our party to break foolish traditions and leave it to the Republican leadership, far more skilled in that art, to break promises." He pledged repeal of Prohibition, relief for farmers, tariff reductions, public works projects, and a host of other reforms. And he ended with the words I quoted at the top of the episode, pledging a new deal for the American people. This would become the slogan and the theme of his campaign.

The 1932 Summer Olympics opened a few months later, in Los Angeles. This would be the second Olympics held in the United States. I don't have much to say about these Games, other than a couple of general observations. The first is that they were conducted much more organized and professional manner than the 1904 St. Louis Olympics. The other is to note that because of the Great Depression, participation was down from 1928, just as it had been at the Winter Olympics. This was the first time Colombia was represented at an Olympics, but against that you have to note the eleven past Olympic-participant nations that passed on this year's Games, probably for financial reasons, including small nations such as Panama, Cuba, and Malta, and some not-so-small nations like Chile, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey.

In any case, two days after the Olympics began in late July, they were overshadowed by grim developments back East, in Washington.

[music: Traditional, "Down by the Riverside."]

William Hushka was an ethnic Lithuanian, born in 1895 in what was then the Russian Empire, who emigrated to the United States. In 1917, when the US declared war on Germany, the now-22-year-old Hushka owned and operated a butcher shop in St. Louis. When the war came, he sold his butcher shop, entrusted the proceeds to his wife, and enlisted in the United States Army.

After the war, Hushka was given an honorable discharge and he returned home. His family moved to Chicago, where he got a job in someone else's butcher shop.

It was common practice in the past, in the United States and some other countries, that after the end of a war, veterans would be paid a bonus, which was meant to compensate them for the difference between their military pay and what they could have earned as civilians. After the Great War, there was a debate in the US over paying a bonus to veterans of that war. I mentioned this debate in episode 224, when I told you that Congress passed a bonus bill, but President Harding vetoed it. Congress upheld the veto narrowly.

Then I told you in episode 230 that Congress tried again with a modified version of the Bonus Bill in 1924. The bill was vetoed again, this time by President Coolidge, but Congress overrode his veto. Per the terms of the Bonus Act, bonuses were calculated for each veteran, based on their service, and a certificate issued for their bonus payment plus interest, payable twenty years later, that is, in 1945, or upon the death of the veteran, whichever came first.

William Hushka was one of the millions of American veterans who had received a bonus certificate. Hushka's entitled him to \$528. Hushka did not prosper after the war. He had trouble keeping a job. His wife divorced him. How many of these troubles can be attributed to his war experiences, versus the economic ups and downs of the postwar period or possible personal issues is a question we can only speculate about.

What we don't have to speculate about is the state of the US economy in 1932. After the boom years of the Roaring Twenties, the US GDP in 1930 was 8.5% smaller than the previous year. In 1931, it was 6% smaller still, and 1932 was the worst year yet; it saw a 13% contraction in the size of the US economy. Cumulatively, the US economy had shrunk by 25% over three years, and there was no end in sight. Unemployment had increased steadily over the same period and was now above 20%. There was no shortage of voices predicting things would soon get better, especially in Washington, but those voices had been saying the same thing for going on three years now, and they had been wrong every time. And through it all, William Hushka held his certificate, good for a \$528 payout in 1945, equivalent to about \$8,000 in our time, though it did him no good now, when he needed it.

In June 1932, Hushka decided to join a group of veterans who were marching to Washington to demand the US government redeem their bonus certificates immediately. He told his brother that if he was going to starve anyway, "I might as well starve there as here."

Altogether, some 10,000 Great War veterans, along with their wives and their children, marched on Washington to demand immediate redemption of those veterans' bonus certificates. They became known as the Bonus Expeditionary Force, or BEF, recalling the British Expeditionary Force of the Great War, or more often simply as the Bonus Army. In Washington, the Bonus Army set up a shantytown, or "Hooverville," on the bank of the Anacostia River in Southeast Washington. The shantytown was organized like a military encampment, with streets and latrines. The veterans spent their days marching and drilling. Identification was checked and no one was allowed to live in the encampment unless they could prove they were a war veteran with an honorable discharge.

Accompanying the Bonus Army to Washington were Communist agitators. The Great Depression had led to a surge in numbers for the Communist Party in the United States, although "surge" is relative in this context. There were still only about 10,000 Party members. But the economic travails of the United States, with its economy shrinking 10% every year, compared to the Soviet Union, where the economy was growing 10% every year, made an eloquent argument for how capitalism was in its death throes and Communism was the wave of the future.

The Communists saw recruiting potential in the Bonus Army, although the leaders of the Bonus Army did not welcome Communists into the shantytown and blocked attempts to distribute Communist literature.

The Superintendent of the District of Columbia police was a man named Pelham Glassford, who had himself served in the war and risen to the rank of general. Glassford was sympathetic to the aims of the Bonus Army. He visited the scene every day to talk to the camp leaders and arranged donations of food and clothing to the Bonus Army. Glassford had no difficulty maintaining order, and he resisted calls for the police to disperse the Bonus Army.

Meanwhile, over on Capitol Hill, Congress considered a bill to advance the redemption date for the bonus certificates. It passed the House, but was defeated in the Senate.

A top secret report from US Army intelligence alleged that the Bonus Army was organized and led by Communists and that it planned to attack and occupy the US Capitol building, which was only about a mile away from their encampment. This occupation was alleged to be the signal for a nationwide Communist uprising. The US Marine Corps garrison in Washington was reported to be riddled with Communist infiltrators and unreliable.

All of this was utter nonsense, of course, and I can't help but note the close resemblance to the Nazi Party's claims about the burning of the Reichstag building, although that event is still seven months in the future. Nevertheless, this report was taken seriously at the highest levels of the US government, including by President Hoover. Thirteen years after the Red Scare, episode 203, the insanity lived on, as the film of Sergei Eisenstein's 1928 re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg played in an endless loop in the minds of Hoover and his Cabinet. Hoover ordered the gates of the White House shut and locked. Secretary of War Patrick

Hurley reportedly complained that the Bonus Army had been too peaceful and expressed hope for an incident that would allow a declaration of martial law.

Superintendent Glassford assigned some members of the Bonus Army, including William Hushka, to quarter in abandoned buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue, between the Capitol and the White House, including spaces that once housed an automobile showroom, a Chinese restaurant, and a funeral home, now all casualties of the Great Depression.

On July 28, after complaints from the White House, Glassford was ordered to evict the squatters from the buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue. He tried. The veterans resisted. A police officer drew his revolver and fired at them. Two of the veterans were killed in the gunfire. One of them was William Hushka, whose \$528 certificate was now payable.

The District of Columbia commissioners asked for military assistance. At 3:00 that afternoon, Hurley ordered the Army chief of staff, General Douglas MacArthur, to take action. By 4:00 the Third Cavalry Regiment, commanded by Major George Patton, was marching into Washington. MacArthur put on his uniform and took personal command of the operation, over the objections of his aide, Major Dwight Eisenhower, who later said, "I told that dumb son-of-a-bitch not to go down there." MacArthur told Eisenhower he had to go because "there is revolution in the air."

By 5:00 the cavalry, along with an infantry unit supported by tanks and machine guns and using tear gas, had driven the Bonus Army out of the Pennsylvania Avenue buildings. When cavalry ran down a group of veterans waving a US flag, a spectator on the sidewalk cried out, "The American flag means nothing to me after this." MacArthur told his troops to arrest that man if he said anything further.

The Bonus Army retreated to the shantytown. Hoover ordered MacArthur not to pursue the Bonus Army into the shantytown. That night, after dark, MacArthur did exactly that, either in defiance of Hoover's order or, as MacArthur later claimed, because of an aide who had not passed to order along. That night the shantytown was attacked with tear gas, and after the inhabitants fled, it was burned down.

Apart from William Hushka and the one other veteran killed on Pennsylvania Avenue, an infant died after exposure to tear gas. Fifty-five people were wounded, 135 were arrested. At a press conference afterward, General MacArthur reported that he had dispersed a mob bent on revolution, and declared that not one in ten of the men of the Bonus Army were actual veterans. This was a lie.

Secretary Hurley declared it a "great victory" and called General MacArthur "the man of the hour." The press were more ambivalent. The *Washington Daily News* reported: "What a pitiful spectacle. The mightiest government in the world chasing unarmed men, women, and children with Army tanks. If the Army must be called out to make war on unarmed citizens, this is no longer America."

In Albany, Franklin Roosevelt was more succinct. He told his staff, “MacArthur has just prevented Hoover’s re-election.”

He may have been right. The torching of the Bonus Army’s Hooverville, the answering of desperate pleas for assistance with bayonets and tanks, and then afterward denouncing the victims as Communist revolutionaries served as an eloquent symbol of the Hoover Administration’s handling of America’s economic disaster. This is before you get to the more abstract economic data, which showed unemployment in November 1932 at 25% and still rising, and the US GDP continuing to contract every month.

Franklin Roosevelt won the 1932 Presidential election with a convincing 57% of the popular vote, not quite the 58% margin by which Herbert Hoover was elected President four years earlier or the 60% racked up by Warren Harding in 1920, but convincing nonetheless. Hoover did carry the African-American vote in 1932, which makes this election notable as the last time a Republican Presidential candidate won a majority of African-American voters.

In electoral college terms, the numbers were even starker, with Roosevelt taking 472 electoral votes, breaking the previous record of 444, set by, um, Herbert Hoover in 1928. Roosevelt swept every region of the United States except the Northeast, the region least hard-hit by the Great Depression. Hoover carried the staunchly Republican New England states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Connecticut, as well as the Mid-Atlantic states of Delaware and Pennsylvania, for six states altogether. Roosevelt took the other 42.

And that’s how Franklin Delano Roosevelt became the 32nd President of the United States. But this story is far from over. The United States is unusual among democratic nations in imposing a long transition period between the election of a new President and the day that new President finally takes office. In this case, 116 days to be exact, from November 8, 1932 to March 4, 1933. With the US economy crumbling by the day, what will happen in the interim? Can America wait that long? Will America wait that long?

But that is a story for next week’s episode. We’ll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I’d especially like to thank Sheril for her kind donation, and thank you to Eric for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Sheril and Eric help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you’d like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue this story into that tumultuous transition period following the US Presidential election of 1932. You might think the US economy couldn't get any worse than it was by November 1932, but it can, and it will. How bad can it get? We'll find out next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Joe Angelo of Camden, New Jersey, had been a member of the American Expeditionary Force during the Great War, when he was 22 years old, where he served as orderly to Colonel George Patton, commander of the 304th Tank Brigade. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during the Meuse-Argonne offensive, which included dragging Colonel Patton to safety after he'd taken a German machine gun bullet in the leg.

Fourteen years later, the now-36-year-old Angelo was one of the veterans living in the Bonus Army encampment when now-Major Patton led the Third Cavalry against them. Afterward, the story goes, an angry Angelo confronted Patton personally over his actions of that day. Patton is said to have told his aides, "I do not know this man. Take him away..."

[music: Traditional, "Down by the Riverside."]