“Revolution in the Air”: The Rout of the Bonus Army and Historical Investigations

Bruce A. Lesh
Franklin High School
Reisterstown, Maryland
Identify the source of this statement:

“Surely a grade of 33 out of 100 on the simplest and most obvious facts of American History is not a record in which any high school can take pride.”
A. The 2011 report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results declaring little growth in students’ knowledge of history.

B. A 2007 report entitled *Failing Our Students, Failing America: Holding Colleges Accountable for Teaching America's History and Institutions*

C. The 2006 (NAEP) report which demonstrated that “Students Gain Only Marginally on Test of U.S. History.”


E. The 1987, NAEP report.


G. Reports of the 1942 *New York Times* history exam that prompted historian Allan Nevins to write that high school students are “all too ignorant of American History.”

H. All of the above

I. None of the above
Answer: I—None of the Above
A 1917 report by professors J. Carleton Bell and David McCollum who tested 668 Texas high school students to determine their sense of history. They discovered:

- 1/3 of students tested could not identify 1776 as the date the Declaration of Independence was signed.
- ½ could not identify Jefferson Davis as the President of the Confederacy.

History in Decline??

“Ignorance of History Shown by College Freshman”

*New York Times*, April, 1943

“History is on the way down and possibly out [of the curriculum].”


“History is in crisis...the situation is nationwide, affecting both secondary schools and higher education in every part of the country.”


“...the lamentable state of history in our educational system...”


“But the importance of a shared memory appears to have lost its foothold in American higher education. As we move forward into the 21st century, our future leaders are graduating with an alarming ignorance of their heritage—a kind of collective amnesia—and a profound historical illiteracy which bodes ill for the future republic.”

*Losing America’s Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century*, 2000
“We learn that there has been little appreciable change in students’ historical knowledge over time…the consistency of these results casts doubts on a presumed golden age of fact retention. Appeals to such an age are more the stuff of national lore and a wistful nostalgia for a time that never was than a reference to a national history whose reality can be found in the documentary record.”

Sam Weinberg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*
Steps for Developing History Labs

1. Formulate and utilize questions that stimulate investigation of the past

2. Develop and implement a common language for investigating the past

3. Utilize a common structure for investigating the past
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Learning to Think Historically: A Tool for Attacking Historical Sources

Text:
What is visible/readable--what information is provided by the source?

Context:
What was going on during the time period? What background information do you have that helps explain the information found in the source?

Subtext:
What is between the lines? Must ask questions about:

Author: Who created the source and what do we know about that person?
Audience: For whom was the source created?
Reason: Why was this source produced at the time it was produced?
Steps for Developing History Labs

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Developing an Historical Investigation

• Identify the focus question to be posed for your investigation

• Determine the historical sources you will use

• Identify what information the sources provide that would assist students’ investigation of the focus question

• Predict the possible interpretations students would develop in response to their investigation of the sources

• How would this investigation help you cover the curriculum?
"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime," (1931)

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 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, I 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, up 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 Doodly Dum,
Half a million boots went slogging 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.
Why don't you remember, I'm your pal? Buddy, can you spare a dime?

Once in khaki suits, gee we looked swell,
Full of that Yankee Doodly Dum,
Half a million boots went slogging 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?
The United States of America
ADJUSTED SERVICE CERTIFICATE

IT IS HEREBY CERTIFIED that pursuant to The War Adjusted Compensation Act and in conformity with the laws of the United States, the amount herein named, 

$200,000.00

... and any indebtedness incurring interest, lawfully incurred and due hereon, shall become due and payable on the first day of

MARCH

1921

... to

FRANK AGARIA

... whose address is

213 PALMYRA ST.

Los Angeles, CA

... upon the death of the veteran prior to the due date above stated, the amount hereinabove stated shall become due and payable to the beneficiary named by the veteran, except that if such beneficiary dies before the veteran and no new beneficiary is named, or if the veteran shall die prior to the due date above stated, the amount shall become due and payable to the estate of the veteran.

This Certificate is issued by the Director of the United States Veterans Bureau, hereinafter referred to as the Director, in compliance with Section 501 of Title V of The War Adjusted Compensation Act and is subject to all the provisions of that Act and regulations prescribed thereunder from time to time by the Director.

The amount under this Certificate shall be paid according to the provisions of the Certificate and in accordance with the provisions of the law. The beneficiary of such amount may effect change of the Certificate with form "Demand for Payment" appearing on the reverse side thereof, duly executed and certified and accompanied by such proof of identity and right to receive payment as may be prescribed, to the Director, in the City of Washington, District of Columbia, or any agent as the Director may designate, and in accordance with such rules and regulations as the Director may prescribe. The execution of form "Demand for Payment" is not a requirement for payment, but is required to an incorporated bank or trust company as a discharge of the certificate and release of all or any part of a loan executed in accordance with the provisions of Title V of The War Adjusted Compensation Act.

The veteran may, with the approval of the Director, change the beneficiary of this Certificate. Change of beneficiary is subject to such regulations as may be prescribed by the Director. Neither this Certificate nor any right conferred herein, or incidental thereto, shall be negotiable, or assignable, or serve as security for any loan except as provided in Section 502 of Title V of The War Adjusted Compensation Act, hereinafter referred to as the Act.

Sec. 502. (a) A loan may be made to a veteran upon his adjusted service certificate, only in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

It is agreed that the loan shall be made by any bank or trust company, hereinafter called "bank", incorporated under the laws of the State in which the bank is located, or by any bank or trust company authorized to do business as such in any other State, if it shall be shown to the satisfaction of the loan officer of such bank or trust company that the amount of such loan will not exceed the face value of the adjusted service certificate or any part thereof, as may be endorsed by the Director in his discretion, to the extent of the amount of the loan approved by the Director, and if 5% of the face value of the adjusted service certificate or any part thereof, as may be endorsed by the Director in his discretion, is charged as interest on such loan, the same being charged at the time of the loan, and not in advance, but to be added to the face value of the adjusted service certificate or any part thereof, as may be endorsed by the Director in his discretion, at the time of the maturity of the loan.

Upon the endorsement of any bank, which shall be deemed a waiver of demand, notice, indorsement of any instrument, presentment, protest, or other notice or demand in the usual course of business, the total amount of any loan shall be an obligation of the United States, and shall be discharged by the United States, without interest, if the loan is called and paid for by the Director. The amount of such loan shall be added to the face value of the adjusted service certificate, as may be endorsed by the Director in his discretion, and held on by the Director, for the purpose of the Act.

Sec. 502. (b) The Federal Reserve Board is authorized to issue such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, and the rules and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law. The Federal Reserve Board is authorized to issue such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, and the rules and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law.

Sec. 503. (a) The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System is authorized to make such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, and the rules and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law.

Sec. 503. (b) The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System is authorized to make such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, and the rules and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law.

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Sec. 504. (c) The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System is authorized to make such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, and the rules and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law.

Sec. 504. (d) The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System is authorized to make such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, and the rules and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law.

Sec. 504. (e) The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System is authorized to make such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act, and the rules and regulations so issued shall have the force and effect of law.
SPECIAL UNEMPLOYMENT ISSUE

VETERANS' SERVICE MAGAZINE
NATIONAL EX-SERVICE MENS’ HELPING HAND

WRITE YOUR
SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN

THEN AND NOW

1918 1931

FAVORING BONUS CASH PAYMENT

THE JOBLESS MUST EAT
NEGRO RANK and FILE WHITE VETERANS
MARCH TO WASHINGTON
TO ARRIVE AT OPENING OF CONGRESS
DECEMBER 5th, 1932
TO DEMAND CASH PAYMENT of BONUS

MARCH TO BE LED BY
RANK AND FILE VETERANS

Again the veterans are going to march to Washington, to demand immediate full cash payment of the Bonus! This time we will have fighting leadership that won't sell us out. Why are we going to march? Let's see.

A WINTER OF HUNGER
FACES THE VETERANS

Cold, brutal winter is now on us. Over a million and a half unemployed veterans are hungry; hundreds of thousands of us have no shelter. And there will be more of us in that fix.

RANK AND FILE VETERANS,
MARCH TO WASHINGTON!

All Veterans March to Washington:
Veterans' organizations, elect Bonus Marchers. All rank and file veterans, including employed and unemployed veterans, should elect delegated Bonus Marchers. Veterans from shops, mills, mines, factories and shipyards from all over the United States should be elected to march in the Bonus March. Fraternal and social organizations should also send their representatives to lead the Bonus March.

ELECT CITY RANK AND FILE VETERANS
TO LEAD THE BONUS MARCH TO WASHINGTON!

A WESTERN LEADER
KEY TO THE EVENTS OF JULY 28, 1932

1. The staging point for the troops from Fort Myer before marching down Pennsylvania Avenue.

2. Camp Glassford, the site of clashes between the Bonus Army and the police, where Huskia was killed and Carlson fatally wounded. Later in the day this will become the first site from which the veterans are expelled by the Army.

3. The Red Camp, site of the second explosion.

4. The 11th St. Bridge crossed by MacArthur for the eviction of the veterans and their families from Camp Marks, Anacostia Park.
• Herbert Hoover           President of the United States
• Pelham Glassford        Police Chief in Washington DC
• General Douglas MacArthur Commander of United States Military
• Major Dwight Eisenhower  Assistant to General MacArthur
• Patrick Hurley           Secretary of War
• Walter Waters            Leader of the Bonus Marchers
• General George Van Horn Moseley General MacArthur’s Chief of Staff
• John Pace                Leader of the Communist Protesters
Washington, D. C.
July 28, 1932
2:55 P.M.

TO: General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff, U. S. Army.

The President has just informed me that the civil government of the District of Columbia has reported to him that it is unable to maintain law and order in the District.

You will have United State troops proceed immediately to the scene of disorder. Cooperate fully with the District of Columbia police force which is now in charge. Surround the affected area and clear it without delay.

Turn over all prisoners to the civil authorities.

In your orders insist that any women and children who may be in the affected area be accorded every consideration and kindness. Use all humanity consistent with the due execution of this order.

PATRICK J. HURLEY

Secretary of War
July 29, 1932

The President said:

"A challenge to the authority of the United States Government has been met, swiftly and firmly. "After months of patient indulgence, the Government met overt lawlessness as it always must be met if the cherished processes of self-government are to be preserved. We cannot tolerate the abuse of Constitutional rights by those who would destroy all government, no matter who they may be. Government cannot be coerced by mob rule. "The Department of Justice is pressing its investigation into the violence which forced the call for Army detachments, and it is my sincere hope that those agitators who inspired yesterday's attack upon the Federal authority may be brought speedily to trial in the civil courts. There can be no safe harbor in the United States of America for violence. "Order and civil tranquility are the first requisites in the great task of economic reconstruction to which our whole people now are devoting their heroic and noble energies. This national effort must not be retarded in even the slightest degree by organized lawlessness. The first obligation of my office is to uphold and defend the Constitution and the authority of the law. This I propose always to do."
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 embroilment. (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.

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.
Sometime after the troops had completed their mission on Pennsylvania Avenue, and before they crossed the Anacostia Bridge with the view of cleaning out the camp on the other side, Mr. Hurley, the Secretary of War, directed me to inform General MacArthur that the President did not wish the troops to cross the bridge that night, to force the evacuation of the Anacostia Camp. I left my office, contacted General MacArthur, and as we walked away, alone, from the others, I delivered that message to him and discussed it with him. He was very much annoyed in having his plans interfered with in any way until they were executed completely. After assuring myself that he understood the message, I left him. As I told him, I was only instructed to deliver the message to him, and having done that I returned to my office. Later I was asked from the White House if I had delivered the message, and assured that I had. Still later, I was instructed to repeat the message and assure myself that General MacArthur received it before he crossed the Anacostia Bridge. I sent Colonel Clement B. Wright, then Secretary to the General Staff, to repeat the message to MacArthur, and explain the situation as I had it from the White House. Colonel Wright contacted General MacArthur immediately, and explained the situation to him fully. As I now recall, Colonel Wright reported to me that the troops had not crossed the Anacostia Bridge, but were advancing on, the bridge. In any event, General MacArthur went on with his plan, carrying it through, compelling the complete evacuation of the large Anacostia Camp, which held most of the veterans. A mission of this kind is a very disagreeable one for the Army, but it was executed with precision and efficiency, and entirely without bloodshed.
For two fruitless months the (bonus marchers) lived in abject squalor making their daily marches to the Capitol, to the White House, and to all of the sacrosanct 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 a sullen, riotous mob.

Through the month of June the tension mounted. . . . At night, morose 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.

Not a shot was fired, (by the federal troops). The sticks, clubs, and stones of the rioters were met only by tear gas and steady pressure. By 9:30 p.m. the area was cleared as far as the Anacostia Flats. The show of force, the excellent discipline of the troops, and the proper use of tear gas had turned the trick without serious bloodshed. At Anacostia Flats I received word from the Secretary of War, as we were in the midst of crossing the river, to suspend the operation at my discretion. I halted the command as soon as we had cleared the bridge, but at that moment the rioters set fire to their own camp. This concluded the proceedings for the night.
Well Done!

U.S. TREASURY

HOOVER

POLITICAL EXPEDIENCE

By Sykes

N.Y. Post 15 Sept 1932
Probably the greatest coup of all was the distortion of the story of the Bonus March on Washington in July 1932…Many Democratic speakers in the campaign of 1932 implied that I had murdered veterans on the streets of Washington.

The story was kept alive for twenty years. I, therefore, deal with it at greater length than would otherwise be warranted. As abundantly proved later on, the march was in considerable part organized and promoted by the Communists and included a large number of hoodlums and ex-convicts determined to raise a public disturbance. …In the midst of this riot the District Commissioners, upon Glassford’s urging, appealed to me. They declared that they could not preserve order in the Capital, that the police were greatly outnumbered, and were being overwhelmed. With the same right of call on me as municipalities have on the governor of any state, they asked for military assistance to restore order. At my direction to Secretary of War Hurley, General Douglas MacArthur was directed to take charge. General Eisenhower (then Colonel [actually major]) was second in command. Without firing a shot or injuring a single person, they cleaned up the situation. Certain of my directions to the Secretary of War, however, were not carried out. Those directions limited action to seeing to it that the disturbing factions returned to their camps outside the business district. I did not wish them driven from their camps, as I proposed that the next day we would surround the camps and determine more accurately the number of Communists and ex-convicts among the marchers. Our military officers, however, having them on the move, pushed them outside the District of Columbia…

…The misrepresentation of the bonus incident for political purposes surpassed any similar action in American history. Not only did Roosevelt use the incident in the 1932 campaign, but Democratic orators also continued to use it for twenty years after, despite all the refutations and proof to the contrary. I was portrayed as a murderer and an enemy of the veterans. A large part of the veterans believe to this day that men who served their country in war were shot down in the streets of Washington by the Regular Army at my orders — yet not a shot was fired or a person injured after the Federal government took charge…
Penn Ave Camp
30 Dec 32
DC 6-27-32
Block bounded by Penn Ave., 3d - 9 1/2 Sts. N.W.
IF IT ONLY WORKS

By Shoemaker, in the Chicago Daily News