

FROM:

THE GLORY AND THE DREAM
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by

WILLIAM MANCHESTER

ONE

The Cruellest Year

THAT AUGUST a writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* asked John Maynard Keynes, the great British economist, whether there had ever been anything like the Depression before. "Yes," he replied. "It was called the Dark Ages, and it lasted four hundred years." This was calamity howling on a cosmic scale, but on at least one point the resemblance seems valid. In each case the people were victims of forces they could not understand.

Some vaguely blamed "conditions," Hoover's euphemism. Others confused the Depression with the stock market Crash of 1929 — "We haven't been to the city since the Depression," they would say, or "I used to, but that was before the Depression." A remarkable number of sufferers stoically accepted the implicit charge of malingering made by President John E. Edgerton of the National Association of Manufacturers: "Many of those who are most boisterous now in clamor for work have either struck on the jobs they had or don't want to work at all, and are utilizing the occasion to swell the communistic chorus." An explanation lies in the strength of the Protestant ethic forty years ago in America. Although millions were trapped in a great tragedy for which there could plainly be no individual responsibility, social workers repeatedly observed that the jobless were suffering from feelings of guilt. "I haven't had a steady job in more than two years," a man facing eviction told a *New York Daily News* reporter in February 1932. "Sometimes I feel like a murderer. What's wrong with me, that I can't protect my children?"

Such men had been raised to believe that if you worked diligently, you would succeed. Now failure was dragging down the diligent and the shiftless alike. Men were demoralized, and "a demoralized people," as Walter Lippmann wrote then, "is one in which the individual has become isolated. He trusts nobody and nothing, not even himself." Seventeen years later, in *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman explained the plight of the inner-directed man

caught in such a crisis: "If repeated failures destroy his hope of future accomplishment, then it is likely that his internal strengths can no longer hold the fort against the external evidence. Overwhelmed with guilt, he will despise himself for his failures and inadequacies." Newspapers of that period are crowded with accounts of men who took their own lives rather than go on relief. Emile Durkheim had created a special category, "altruistic suicides," for men who killed themselves rather than become a burden to the community.

The real blame lay in the false underpinnings of the Coolidge-Hoover "New Era" prosperity. Seen in perspective, the Depression appears to have been the last convulsion of the industrial revolution, creating a hiatus before the technological revolution. In the aftermath of the World War, the techniques of mass production combined to increase the efficiency per man-hour by over 40 percent. This enormous output of goods clearly required a corresponding increase of consumer buying power—that is, higher wages. But the worker's income in the 1920s didn't rise with his productivity. In the golden year of 1929, Brookings economists calculated that to supply the barest necessities a family would need an income of \$2,000 a year—more than 60 percent of American families were earning. In short, the ability to buy did not keep abreast of the volume of goods being turned out. It was part of the foolishness of the time to argue that the surge in production was no problem, that "a good salesman can sell anything." In practice this meant that while the rich (and many who weren't rich) were speculating in stocks, zealous salesmen were encouraging a kind of mass speculation. Customers of limited means were being persuaded to take products anyhow, the exchange being accomplished by an overextension of credit.

The stock market, honeycombed with credit in the form of brokers' loans, crashed of its own weight, calling to account the millions of little deals consummated by commercial travelers who had sold anything and everything to people lacking the means to pay for it. Thus ended the New Era prosperity. The panic followed, and the country couldn't cope with it. The last extended economic crisis had been in 1893; since then America had become so industrialized that a massive return to the farm was impossible. There was a certain rough justice in Herbert Hoover's ascent to the Presidency on the eve of the catastrophe, for as Secretary of Commerce he had been fascinated with productivity and indifferent to the dangerous lack of buying power. Long after he left the White House, he realized what had happened and wrote: "A margin of some thousands . . . got too much of the productive pie for the services they performed. . . . Another margin of some 20 percent got too little."

Between the Crash and 1932, the cruelest year of the Depression, the economy's downward spiral was accelerated by measures which, according to all accepted canons, ought to have brought recovery, and which in practice did the opposite. To protect investments, prices had to be maintained.

Sales ebbed, so costs were cut by laying off men. The unemployed could not buy the goods of other industries. Therefore sales dropped further, leading to more layoffs and a general shrinkage of purchasing power, until farmers were pauperized by the poverty of industrial workers, who in turn were pauperized by the poverty of farmers. "Neither has the money to buy the product of the other," an Oklahoma witness testified before a congressional subcommittee, explaining the vicious circle. "Hence we have overproduction and underconsumption at the same time and in the same country."

In June 1932, Ivy League seniors joined 21,974 other alumni hunting for jobs. By then New York department stores were requiring bachelor degrees for all elevator operators, and that was the best many of them could do, but twenty-year-old Sylvia Field Porter, Hunter '32, was an exception. She switched her major from English to economics because of what she later called "an overwhelming curiosity to know why everything was crashing around me and why people were losing their jobs" and talked her way into an investment counsel firm. At the same time she began a systematic study of the financial world, with the thought that one day she might write a column about it.* She then discovered that she was in the middle of a crisis without historical precedent.

Ever since the fiasco of England's South Sea Company in 1720, the phrase "South Sea bubble" had been used to describe a doomed business venture. The bubble had certainly burst; South Sea stock had plunged to 13.5 percent of its highest quotation. Yet it subsequently rallied, and the firm continued to do business for eighty years. By the time of Miss Porter's commencement, however, United States Steel and General Motors had dropped to 8 percent of their pre-Crash prices. Overall, stocks listed on the Big Board were worth 11 percent of their 1929 value. Investors had lost 74 billion dollars, three times the cost of the World War. More than 5,000 American banks had failed—in Iowa City, just across the county line from Hoover's native West Branch, all five banks were shut—and 86,000 businesses had closed their doors. The country's Gross National Product had fallen from 104 billion dollars to 41 billion (in 1973 it would be 2,177 billion). In 1932, 273,000 families were evicted from their homes, and the average weekly wage of those who had jobs was \$16.21.

Some enterprises flourished. The contraceptive business was netting a quarter-billion dollars a year, a fact which the youth of that day conveniently forgot after they had become parents. Over half the population was going to the movies once a week (admission was a quarter for adults, a dime for children), and each year saw an increase in the number of cigarette smokers, none of them aware that the habit might be harmful. Kelvinator refrigerators and Atwater Kent radios were moving briskly. Miniature golf courses and circulation libraries were booming. Alfred C.

*Sylvia Porter began writing for the *New York Post* in 1935.

Fuller was doing very nicely with his corps of door-to-door brush salesmen; in the grim month of August 1932 his sales leaped from \$15,000 to \$50,000 and grew thereafter at the rate of a million dollars a year. A prodigy named J. Paul Getty was quietly picking up cheap petroleum wells; that February he gained control of 520,000 of the Pacific Oil Corporation's one million shares. Here and there a venture was lucky. In Quincy, Massachusetts, the owner of a curious restaurant with a bright orange roof and pseudo Colonial architecture was almost bankrupt when a stock company opened across the street. Its first play was Eugene O'Neill's nine-act *Strange Interlude*. Every evening there was an 8:30 intermission for supper, and the restaurateur, Howard Johnson, survived.

But these were exceptions. U.S. Steel, the key to heavy industry, was operating at 19.1 percent of capacity. The American Locomotive Company didn't need much steel. During the 1920s it had sold an average of 600 locomotives a year; in 1932 it sold one. Nor was the automotive industry the big steel customer it had been. Month by month its fine names were vanishing: the Stutz Motor Company, the Auburn, the Cord, the Edward Peerless, the Pierce Arrow, the Duesenberg, the Franklin, the Durant, the Locomobile. One rash man decided to challenge Ford with another low-priced car. He called it the Rockne, lost 21 million dollars, and killed himself. In January an inventive bacteriologist named Arthur G. Sherman had become the sensation of the Detroit Auto Show by exhibiting the first crude, hand-carpentered, wooden trailer. In 1932 he sold just eighty of them. Air transport nose-dived. Airliners then had twelve seats, of which, the Department of Commerce reported, an average of seven were flying empty. And with the exception of the new talkies, most entertainers were foundering. In four years the jazz musician Eddie Condon landed four recording sessions; the phonograph recording industry had dwindled from 50 million dollars a year to a quarter-million. Sally Rand was making a precarious living with her celebrated fans; to a reporter who asked why she did it, she replied, "I never made any money till I took off my pants."

Because poverty was considered shameful, people tried to conceal destitution from neighbors, often with considerable success. One could never be sure about the family across the street. The smartly dressed young lawyer who always left home at the same time each morning may have been off to sell cheap neckties, magazines, vacuum cleaners, pressure cookers, or Two-in-One shoe polish door-to-door in a remote neighborhood. He may have changed his clothes and gone to another part of the city to beg. Or he may have been one of the millions who looked for work day after day, year after year, watching his children grow thinner and fighting despair in the night. There were certain skills developed by men who spent their days in the streets. You learned to pay for a nickel cup of coffee, to ask for another cup of hot water free, and, by mixing the hot water with the ketchup on the counter, to make a kind of tomato soup. In winter you stuffed newspapers under your shirt to ward off the cold; if

you knew you would be standing for hours outside an employment office, you wrapped burlap bags around your legs and tied them in place. Shoes were a special problem. Pasteboard could be used for inner soles, and some favored cotton in the heels to absorb the pounding of the concrete. But if a shoe was really gone, nothing worked. The pavement destroyed the cardboard and then the patch of sock next to it, snow leaked in and accumulated around your toes, and shoe nails stabbed your heels until you learned to walk with a peculiar gait.

It was remarkable how ingenious an impoverished, thrift-minded family could be. Men resharpened and reused old razor blades, rolled their own cigarettes or smoked Wings (ten cents a pack), and used twenty-five-watt light bulbs to save electricity. Children returned pop bottles for two cents or stood in line for day-old bread at the bakery. Women cut sheets lengthwise and resealed them to equalize wear, retailed their clothes for their daughters, and kept up a brave front with the wife next door — who may have been doing the same thing on the same meager budget. Families sorted Christmas cards so they could be sent to different friends next year. Sometimes a man would disappear for weeks. All the neighborhood knew was that he had gone on a "business trip." It was a considerate husband who withheld the details of such trips from his wife, for they were often more terrible than anything she could imagine.

He was, of course, looking for work. The legends of job hunting had become folklore by 1932, and some of the unbelievable stories were true. Men *did* wait all night outside Detroit employment offices so they would be first in line next morning. An Arkansas man *did* walk nine hundred miles looking for work. People *did* buy jobs. In Manhattan a Sixth Avenue employment agency *did* have five thousand applicants for three hundred jobs. It is a matter of record that a labor subcommittee of the 72nd Congress heard testimony about men setting forest fires in the state of Washington so they would be hired to put them out. *Business Week* verified the fact that a great many people who no longer loved America either left it or attempted to. Throughout the early Thirties the country's emigration exceeded its immigration. Amtorg, the Russian trading agency in New York, was getting 350 applications a day from Americans who wanted to settle in Russia. On one memorable occasion Amtorg advertised for six thousand skilled workers and a hundred thousand showed up, including plumbers, painters, mechanics, cooks, engineers, carpenters, electricians, salesmen, printers, chemists, shoemakers, librarians, teachers, dentists, a cleaner and dyer, an aviator, and an undertaker.

New York drew countless job seekers from surrounding states, though the city had a million jobless men of its own. A few strangers joined Manhattan's seven thousand nickel shoeshine "boys" or found furtive roles in the bootleg coal racket — 10 percent of the city's coal was being sneaked in by unemployed Pennsylvania miners — but most outsiders wound up on one of New York's eighty-two breadlines. If a man had a dime he could

sleep in a flophouse reeking of sweat and Lysol. If he was broke he salvaged some newspapers and headed for Central Park, or the steps of a subway entrance, or the municipal incinerator. The incinerator's warmth drew hundreds of men on winter nights, even though they had to sleep on great dunes of garbage.

Returning from such an expedition in or under an empty freight car, a husband would review family assets with his wife and estimate how long they could keep going. Wedding rings would be sold, furniture pawned, life insurance borrowed upon, money begged from relatives. Often the next step was an attempt at a home business, with its implicit confession to the neighborhood that the pretense of solvency had been a hoax. The yard might be converted to a Tom Thumb miniature golf course. The husband might open a "parlor grocery." The wife might offer other wives a wash, set, and manicure for a dollar. In Massachusetts, idle textile workers erected looms in their living rooms; in Connecticut, households strung safety pins on wires, toiling long hours and earning a total of five dollars a week for an entire family.

These last-ditch efforts rarely succeeded; there were so few potential customers with money. Finally hope was abandoned. The father went to the city hall, declared himself penniless, and became a statistic. Because those figures were poorly kept, the precise extent of poverty is unknown. Somewhere between 15 million and 17 million men were unemployed, with most of them representing a family in want. *Fortune*, in September 1932, estimated that 34 million men, women, and children were without any income whatever. That was nearly 28 percent of the population, and like all other studies it omitted America's 11 million farm families, who were suffering in a rural gethsemane of their own.

During the Nixon Presidency, when America's farm population had shrunk to 5.2 percent of the population, it was hard to realize that only forty years earlier 25.1 percent had been living, or trying to live, on the land. They had not shared in New Era prosperity; the Crash merely worsened a situation which had already become a national scandal. By 1932 U.S. farmers had come to remind one reporter of Mongolian peasants seen in the rotogravure sections of Sunday newspapers, and the shadow of imminent famine fell across the plains. Agricultural prices hadn't been so low since the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Farmers were getting less than twenty-five cents for a bushel of wheat, seven cents for a bushel of corn, a dime for a bushel of oats, a nickel for a pound of cotton or wool. Sugar was bringing three cents a pound, hogs and beef two and a half cents a pound, and apples — provided they were flawless — forty cents for a box of two hundred.

Translated into the bitter sweat of rural life, this meant that a wagon of oats wouldn't buy a pair of four-dollar Thom McAn shoes. A wagon of wheat would just do it, but with mortgage interest running at \$3.60 an

acre, plus another \$1.90 in taxes, the wheat farmer was losing \$1.50 on every acre he reaped. In cotton fields the strongest and most agile man would toil from "can see" to "can't see" — fourteen hours of daylight — and receive sixty cents for the 300 pounds he had picked. It was cheaper to burn corn than sell it and buy coal. With meat bringing such ruinous prices, a man would spend \$1.10 to ship a sheep to market, where it would return him less than \$1.00. In Montana a rancher bought bullets on credit, spent two hours slaughtering a herd of livestock, and left it rotting in a canyon. It wasn't worth its feed. Turning away, he muttered to a reporter, "One way to beat the Depression, huh?"

As farm prices caved in, tens of thousands of mortgage foreclosure notices went up on gateposts and county courthouses. It has been estimated that one-fourth of the state of Mississippi was auctioned off. William Allen White, the Republican country editor who had pleaded with Hoover to come and see what was happening to the Middle West, wrote, "Every farmer, whether his farm is under mortgage or not, knows that with farm products priced as they are today, sooner or later he must go down." When the farmer did fail, unable even to pay the small costs of binder twine, tool repair, and seed, the bank would take title as absentee landlord, and he would rent from it the land his family had owned for generations. Meantime, while ranchers fed mutton to buzzards and warmed their hands over corn fires, millions in the cities could not afford the low prices which were destroying farmers (butter at 39 cents a pound, prime rib roast at 21 cents, two dozen eggs for 41 cents) because so many were idle and those who had jobs were often earning what could only be called starvation wages.

There was no one to protect them. The President disapproved of wage cuts and said so, but he was equally opposed to wage-hour legislation, so that when U.S. Steel made its second big wage slash in the spring of 1932, the workers were helpless. The labor movement was almost extinct; AFL membership had dwindled from 4.1 million in 1920 to 2.2 million, about 6 percent of the work force. There were strikes of desperation in 1932. All were lost. Miners were paid \$10.88 a month, were at the mercy of check-weight men, and were required to buy groceries at inflated prices in the company store; when they rebelled the protest was bloodily suppressed by armed strikebreakers backed by the National Guard. The United Mine Workers were too weak to offer the victims anything but sympathy.

In such New England mill towns as Lynn and Lowell, where only one worker in three was employed, men were treated like serfs; one of them left Manchester, New Hampshire, to apply for a job in New Haven, was arrested, brought before a judge on a charge of vagrancy, and ordered back to his Manchester mill. The immense pool of job seekers tempted employers to slash their wage bills again and again. Department stores paid clerks as little as five dollars a week. An investigation in Chicago disclosed that the majority of working girls were getting less than twenty-five

cents an hour; for a fourth of them, it was less than a dime. In 1932 hourly rates had shrunk to ten cents in lumbering, seven-and-a-half cents in general contracting, six cents in brick and tile manufacturing, and five cents in sawmills. Before the Depression, Massachusetts textile mills rarely required skilled operators to be responsible for more than twenty looms eight hours a day. Then the mills introduced speedups and stretch-outs, and Louis Adamic saw teen-aged girls running thirty wide looms from before dawn until after sunset.

In the sweatshops of Brooklyn fifteen-year-olds were paid \$2.78 a week. Women received as little as \$2.39 for a fifty-hour week. In the summer of 1932 the Connecticut Commissioner of Labor reported that there were over a hundred shops in the state paying as little as sixty cents for a fifty-five-hour week. New York City was the worst sweat spot in that state, and its garment industry, employing fifty thousand women, was the most sweated trade. "Unscrupulous employers," *Time* reported, had "battered wages down to the Chinese coolie level." Hat makers crocheted hats for forty cents a dozen; in a week a worker could make two dozen. Apron girls were paid two-and-a-half cents an apron; they earned twenty cents a day. A slipper liner received twenty-one cents for lining seventy-two pairs; if she completed one slipper every forty-five seconds, she took home \$1.05 after a nine-hour day. Girl cleaners in a pants factory were paid a half-cent for each garment they threaded and sponged. It was a five-minute operation; their income was six cents an hour. Honest employers could not survive that kind of competition. Welfare rolls grew longer and longer, the President continued to withhold federal help, and as the fourth Depression winter loomed the relief structure began to disintegrate.

When a senator declared the workers simply could not survive on one or two days' wages a week, President J. E. Edgerton of the National Association of Manufacturers said, "Why, I've never thought of paying men on the basis of what they need. I pay for efficiency. Personally, I attend to all those other things, social welfare stuff, in my church work." Doubtless he thought he did. As *Fortune* explained it, the theory was that now, as in the past, private charity and semipublic welfare groups could care for the old, the sick, and the indigent.

It wasn't working. The Depression, while multiplying the demands upon charities, had dried up their sources of contributions. By 1932, private help had dwindled to 6 percent of the money spent upon the needy, leaving some thirty million people to public welfare. Unfortunately, local governments couldn't handle the burden. State and city budgets had been in the red since 1930. About nine-tenths of municipal income came from taxation on real estate, which in terms of the Depression dollar was ludicrously overappraised. Landlords were liable to taxation if they held title to buildings; their inability to realize income from their houses was legally irrelevant, even when their tenants were on municipal relief, which never paid

rentals. The landlords tried desperately to get their money. At first, in exasperation, they turned penniless occupants out. In New York there was hardly a block without a daily dispossession, and in Philadelphia so many families were put on the street that little girls invented a doll game called Eviction.

But empty tenements solved nothing; they merely contributed to the unpopularity of men of property while leaving tax bills unpaid. Eventually, as Professor Sumner H. Slichter of the Harvard Business School explained to the Senate Committee on Manufactures, there was "a more or less national moratorium on rents, insofar as the unemployed are concerned." Delinquent tax ratios hovered between 20 and 30 percent in metropolitan areas, and the cities, lacking this revenue, cut services. Roads were unpaved, sidewalks crumbled, streets blocked by winter snow were left unplowed. Chicago, deprived of two years' receipts by a taxpayers' strike, borrowed from the banks — and agonized over its unemployed population of 600,000.

Given the bankruptcy of public treasuries, and the widespread feeling that the poor were somehow responsible for their fate, it was inevitable that admittance to relief rolls would be made extremely difficult. Before applications were even considered, homes and possessions had to be sold, insurance canceled, credit exhausted, and evidence produced that all known relatives were broke. Even then, in many cities no assistance was granted to unmarried people or people without young children. Every possible stigma was attached to aid. In September 1932 Lewiston, Maine, voted to bar all welfare recipients from the polls, a goal already achieved by property requirements in the constitutions of ten states from Massachusetts to Oregon. West Virginia hospitals refused to admit patients unless payment for services was guaranteed; a referring physician suggested to one surgeon that he delay operating upon a child until the parents promised to pay \$1,000. Two doctors in Royce City, Texas, put the following advertisement in the local paper:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: If you are expecting the stork to visit your home this year and he has to come by way of Royce City, he will have to bring a checkbook to pay his bill before delivery.

In some communities taxpayer associations tried to prevent welfare children from attending schools, and families receiving public assistance were known to have been excluded from churches.

Even those who surmounted all barriers found that the approval of a welfare application was exceptional. In mill towns, mining communities, and on sharecropper farms, *Fortune* reported, "relief is merely a name." In the cities only 25 percent of qualified families were getting some form of help. The mayor of Toledo said in 1932: "I have seen thousands of these defeated, discouraged, hopeless men and women, cringing and fawning as they come to ask for public aid. It is a spectacle of national degradation."

Admittance to the rolls did not end the defeat, discouragement, and hopelessness. In Philadelphia a family of four was given \$5.50 a week, which hardly encouraged the debauchery predicted by those who objected to the dole, and Philadelphia was munificent compared to New York (\$2.39), Mississippi (\$1.50) and Detroit (\$.60). At the most, assistance covered only food and fuel. Since welfare families had often been inadequately clothed before the Crash, their rags three winters later sometimes defied description. It was not uncommon to see the head of a family dressed like a vaudeville tramp, wearing a buttonless suit coat out at one elbow, a pair of trousers out at the knee and in the seat, an old summer cap that had hung for years in some furnace room, worn tennis shoes covered by patched rubbers, a pair of mismatched canvas gloves; the whole covered by a filthy old sheepskin.

Frequently public employees were almost indistinguishable from public wards, since money for both came from the same sources. As a rule community elders found a way to provide their policemen with decent uniforms, for it was a time of anxiety about public safety. This concern did not cover schoolteachers, who more than any other group were victims of local governments' inadequate tax base. At the beginning of the Depression they had been assessed part of their pay to finance soup kitchens. With the school population increasing by over two hundred thousand each year, further economies were inevitable. Desks were set up in corridors, in coal-heated portables, in tin shacks; courses in art and music were stricken from the curriculum; the same textbooks were handed down semester after semester; until they had become dog-eared, dirty, with pages defaced or missing. Classrooms became more and more crowded. Finally, the money to pay the teachers began to disappear.

By 1932, a third of a million children were out of school because of lack of funds. Teachers in Mississippi, northern Minnesota, Idaho, South Dakota, and Alabama managed to eat only by "boarding around" at the homes of parents. In Dayton, Ohio, schools were open only three days a week; in Arkansas over three hundred schools were closed ten months or more. In Kansas, twenty-five-cent wheat meant rural teachers were being paid \$35 a month for an eight-month year — \$280 a year. In Iowa they were receiving \$40 a month, half the income Washington had said was necessary for industrial workers to exist. Akron owed its teachers \$360,000, Youngstown \$500,000, Detroit \$800,000, and Chicago's debts to its teachers were more than 20 million dollars.

The story of the Chicago schools was a great Depression epic. Rather than see 500,000 children remain on the streets, the teachers hitchhiked to work, endured "payless paydays" — by 1932 they had received checks in only five of the last thirteen months — and accepted city scrip to be redeemed after the Depression, even though Chicago bankers would not accept it. Somehow the city found money to invest in its forthcoming World's Fair of 1933, when Sally Rand would gross \$6,000 a week, but it

turned a deaf ear to the Board of Education. A thousand teachers were dismissed outright. Those who remained taught on at immense personal sacrifice. Collectively the 1,400 teachers lost 759 homes. They borrowed \$1,128,000 on their insurance policies and another \$232,000 from loan sharks at annual interest rates of 42 percent, and although hungry themselves, they fed 11,000 pupils out of their thin pocketbooks.

Teachers, welfare workers, and policemen saw hardship at close range. Nobody called cops pigs in the early 1930s. Even when they were used to break strikes, it was widely acknowledged that they were as exploited as the workers.* In New York, men on the beat had been distributing food in the most stricken neighborhoods since 1930. The money came from city employees, including themselves, who contributed 1 percent of their salaries; as Caroline Bird pointed out, this was "the first public confession of official responsibility for plain poverty, and it came, not from the top, but from the lowest civil servants, who worked down where the poor people were."

Once more the teachers bore witness to the worst, for the most heart-breaking Depression martyrs were in the classrooms. In October of that terrible year, a month before the presidential election, the New York City Health Department reported that over 20 percent of the pupils in the public schools were suffering from malnutrition. In the mining counties of Ohio, West Virginia, Illinois, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania, the secretary of the American Friends Service Committee told a congressional committee, the ratio was sometimes over 90 percent, with deprived children afflicted by "drowsiness, lethargy, and sleepiness," and "mental retardation." A teacher suggested that one little girl go home and eat something; the child replied, "I can't. This is my sister's day to eat." A little boy exhibited his pet rabbit to a visitor and the boy's older sister whispered, "He thinks we aren't going to eat it, but we are." Lillian Wald, a social worker, asked in anguish, "Have you ever seen the uncontrolled trembling of parents who have starved themselves for weeks so that their children might not go hungry?" A bitter father said, "A worker's got no right to have kids any more," and a Massachusetts priest said, "One family I know has lived on lentils, nothing but lentils, all this year. They can't afford to buy bread. What is going to happen to our children?"

"Nobody is actually starving," President Hoover told reporters. "The hoboes, for example, are better fed than they have ever been. One hobo in New York got ten meals in one day." In September 1932 *Fortune* flatly called the President a liar and suggested that "twenty-five millions in want" might be a fairer description of the nation's economic health. Cases of starvation were being chronicled by *Fortune*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, and in congressional testimony. The New York City Welfare Council reported 29 victims of starvation and 110,

*The day after the bloody suppression of hungry marchers at the Ford plant on March 7, Detroit's police commissioner laid off 162 policemen.

mostly children, dead of malnutrition. Hoover simply hadn't seen the suffering, though he was not to be spared after his departure from the White House; on a fishing trip in the Rocky Mountains he was led by a native to a hut where one child had succumbed and seven others were dying of hunger.

Millions stayed alive by living like animals. In the Pennsylvania countryside they were eating wild weed-roots and dandelions; in Kentucky they chewed violet tops, wild onions, forget-me-nots, wild lettuce, and weeds which heretofore had been left to grazing cattle. City mothers hung around docks, waiting for spoiled produce to be discarded and then fighting homeless dogs for possession of it. After the vegetables had been loaded on trucks they would run alongside, ready to snatch up anything that fell off. A cook in a midwestern hotel put a pail of leftovers in the alley outside the kitchen; immediately a dozen men loomed out of the darkness to fight over it. In Long Beach, California, a sixty-six-year-old physician named Francis Everett Townsend glanced out his window while shaving and saw, among a group of refuse barrels, "three haggard very old women," as he later called them, "stooped with great age, bending over the barrels, clawing into the contents." Whole families were seen plunging into refuse dumps, gnawing at bones and watermelon rinds; a Chicago widow always removed her glasses so she wouldn't see the maggots. At night in New York Thomas Wolfe observed "the homeless men who prowled in the vicinity of restaurants, lifting the lids of garbage cans and searching around inside for morsels of rotten food." He saw them "everywhere, and noticed how their numbers increased during the hard and desperate days of 1932."

It was considered benevolent by well-to-do Americans that year to give your garbage to fellow countrymen who were famished. The Elks of Mount Kisco, New York, and the eating clubs of Princeton University instructed their servants to see that their leftovers reached the needy. The *Brooklyn Eagle* proposed a central depot where edible swill could be sent by charitable citizens and where the poor might apply for portions of it. In Oklahoma City John B. Nichlos, a gas company executive, worked out a plan under which restaurants, civic clubs, and hotel chefs would pack swill in "sanitary containers of five (5) gallons each," to be "labeled 'MEAT, BEANS, POTATOES, BREAD AND OTHER ITEMS.'" The Salvation Army would pick up the cans, the contents of which would then be distributed to jobless men who would first chop wood donated by — of all people — the farmers. "We expect a little trouble now and then from those who are not worthy of the support of the citizens," the gas man wrote Secretary of the Army Hurley, "but we must contend with such cases in order to take care of those who are worthy." Hurley thought it a marvelous idea, and urged the administration to adopt it. It was vetoed by the director of Hoover's Emergency Committee for Employment on the ground that the gesture might be misunderstood.

It never seems to have occurred to Nichlos, the *Eagle*, the Princetonians

and the Elks that more dramatic solutions might lie ahead. But already there were those who pondered the contrast between the well-fed rich and the starving multitude, and who thought they saw the dark shadow of things to come. Thomas Wolfe would talk to the tragic men in New York's public toilets until he could not stand their anguish any more. Then he would mount the steps to the pavement twenty feet above and gaze out upon "the giant hackles of Manhattan shining coldly in the cruel brightness of the winter night. The Woolworth Building was not fifty yards away, and a little farther down were the silvery spires and needles of Wall Street, great fortresses of stone and steel that housed enormous banks. The blind injustice of this . . . seemed the most brutal part of the whole experience, for there . . . in the cold moonlight, only a few blocks away from this abyss of human wretchedness and misery, blazed the pinnacles of power where a large section of the entire world's wealth was locked in mighty vaults."

In adversity Americans have always looked for scapegoats, and by early 1932 other hunters, like Wolfe, were closing in on lower Manhattan. The prey there was fat and vulnerable. In the Twenties American financiers and industrialists had become national folk heroes. In vain had William Z. Ripley of Harvard warned President Coolidge that "prestidigitation, double-shuffling, honeyfugling, hornswoggling and skulduggery" were threatening the economy; Coolidge refused to be daunted by prophets of gloom and doom. For nine years, as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. later wrote, the government had treated business as though it had "discovered the philosopher's stone which would transmute the uncertainties of the capitalist system into permanent prosperity." Mellon had become known as "the greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Alexander Hamilton," and *Nation's Business* had reported that the American businessman was "the most influential person in the nation." But now, three years after the Crash, children were singing:

*Mellon pulled the whistle,
Hoover rang the bell,
Wall Street gave the signal,
And the country went to hell.*

The high priests of finance weren't listening. Their world remained insular, arrogant, and out of touch. In the *Literary Digest* they read of the Depression's blessings: "People are growing more courteous in business, and often more reasonable at home, thoughtless women especially. Unappreciative wives who were indifferent to their husbands and neglected their homes have become tame and cautious." A Republican candidate for governor of New Jersey had good news for the voters: "There is something about too much prosperity that ruins the moral fiber of the people." A member of the Du Pont family was reported to have rejected a suggestion that he sponsor a Sunday afternoon program on the ground that "at three o'clock on Sunday afternoons everybody is playing polo," and J. P. Morgan

observed that if "you destroy the leisure class, you destroy civilization. By the leisure class, I mean the families who employ one servant — twenty-five or thirty million families." He seemed startled when told that census figures showed there were fewer than two million servants in the entire country. The people were not surprised by his misinformation; by then, Walter Lippmann wrote, industrial and financial leaders had fallen "from one of the highest positions of influence and power that they have ever occupied in our history to one of the lowest."

In 1932, 65 percent of American industry belonged to 600 corporations; 1 percent of the population owned 59 percent of the wealth. One man, Samuel Insull of Chicago, held 85 directorships, 65 board chairmanships, and 11 company presidencies. His utilities empire was a conglomerate of 150 companies, with 50,000 employees serving 3,250,000 customers. On New Year's Day its securities were valued at over three billion dollars, and unemployed men warming themselves over scrap wood fires on the lower level of Wacker Drive looked up at the Insull offices far above and wondered aloud to reporters why the old man couldn't help them.

He couldn't because he had problems of his own. His pyramid of holding companies was collapsing, and thousands of Chicagoans — including a great many schoolteachers — were about to learn in horror that their Insull stock had dropped to 4 percent of its 1931 value. Insull scurried about trying to salvage something, protected day and night by thirty-six bodyguards, but in April his two investment trusts went into receivership. By June he had fled to Europe, sixty million dollars in debt; a Cook County grand jury indicted him. In Paris he craftily scheduled a press conference, sneaked out the back door to board a midnight express for Rome, and flew on to Athens. His lawyers had told him he would be safe there, because there were no extradition treaties between Greece and the United States. It was true then, but by early November the diplomats had signed one. Disguised as a woman, the fugitive chartered a boat for Turkey. The Turks turned him over to American authorities; he was brought back, tried — and found not guilty, because holding companies were not subject to regulation. "A holding company," Will Rogers said dryly, "is a thing where you hand an accomplice the goods while the policeman searches you."

Rogers also said, "There's a lot of things these old boys have done that are within the law, but it's so near the edge you couldn't slip a razor blade between their acts and a prosecution." Looking for evidence, the Democratic Congress was turning over stones up and down Wall Street, and some remarkable specimens were crawling out. Banker Albert H. Wiggin had sold the stock of his own bank (the Chase) short and then lied about it. Because of the depressed economy, Charles E. Mitchell of the National City Bank had broken an agreement to merge with the Corn Exchange Bank; at the same time he was tormenting his own clerks and tellers by demanding that they keep up their installment payments on National City stock bought at pre-Crash prices (\$200 a share, now down to \$40) — and

loaning \$2,400,000 of the stockholders' money to bank officers, with neither collateral nor interest, for market speculation. Mitchell had avoided federal income tax by selling securities to a member of his family at a loss and later buying them back. Through similar loopholes J. P. Morgan had paid no income tax in 1929, 1930, or 1931. Colonel Robert R. McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune*, sent the government a token \$1,500 a year while writing long editorials urging his subscribers to pay their taxes in full.

As Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon had also hounded people who were reluctant to meet their tax obligations — and had similarly applied a different standard to himself. The country was astonished to learn that at Mellon's request his commissioner of internal revenue had prepared a memorandum for him describing twelve ways to evade federal taxes. A Treasury Department tax expert had then been assigned to work on Mellon's personal returns. Five of the commissioner's suggestions had been followed, including the recording of fictitious gifts and losses to reduce tax liability. These disclosures aroused Representative Wright Patman of Texas, who on January 25, 1932, asked the House to impeach Secretary Mellon "for high crimes and misdemeanors," but there were those who still regarded Mellon with reverence. To them the publication of these singular facts was a form of *lèse majesté*; one admirer, Mellon's lawyer, sharply rebuked a *New York Times* reporter for "providing ammunition for radicals."

Like the Insull machinations, tax dodges were legal. But despite the tax legislation of the time, some men had crossed into criminal territory. Ivar Kreuger, "the Swedish Match King," was a Grand Officer of the French Legion of Honor, an adviser to President Hoover on European aspects of the Depression, and a man of such probity that in 1928, when the Boston firm of Lee, Higginson prepared to issue millions on Kreuger securities, its officers had agreed with the Match King that an audit of his books was unnecessary. On March 12, 1932, he bought a large pistol, locked the door of his luxury apartment in Paris, and killed himself. After all the moving eulogies had been delivered, it turned out that the king had been a common thief, guilty of swindling, fraud, and forging Italian government bonds. Among other things he had stolen over three hundred million dollars from trusting investors.

Every week brought fresh shocks. Joseph Wright Harriman, a banker (or "bankster," as *Time* had it) and a cousin of Averell Harriman, left his failing bank and took refuge in a Manhattan nursing home. As the law closed in, he escaped to a Long Island inn, registering under an alias. The Nassau County police found him anyhow. Harriman tried to drive a butcher's knife between his ribs, failed at that, too, and served two years in prison for falsifying his bank's books and misapplying its funds. Saul Singer, executive vice president of the Bank of the United States — the largest American bank ever to fail — went to the penitentiary on the same charges, and later Howard Hopson, president of the Associated Gas and Electric Company and responsible to 188,576 investors, was captured in

Washington after a wild taxicab chase and found guilty on seventeen counts of mail fraud. "Confidence in the erstwhile leadership of this country is gone," George Sokolsky wrote. Representative Fiorello La Guardia said of a stock manipulation case, "Sordid as these facts may seem, I believe the same sort of story could be told regarding every stock in which there was a pool," and Joseph P. Kennedy, himself a market tycoon, concluded, "The belief that those in control of the corporate life of America were motivated by honesty and ideals of honorable conduct" had been "completely shattered."

Viewed in this light, the conduct of Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation can only be called a major political blunder. In 1932 the congressional leadership finally pushed through an act authorizing the RFC to advance the states 300 million dollars for unemployment relief. By the end of the year only 30 million had actually reached the states, one-third of the amount Dawes had loaned to his Central Republic Bank and Trust Company of Chicago. It was perhaps symbolic that when the President telephoned former Senator Atlee Pomerene of Ohio to appoint him Dawes's successor, Pomerene had exactly ninety-eight cents in his pocket, and that on his way to be sworn in, a dozen panhandlers approached him. As public policy the RFC was broke. Millions were calling it "a breadline for big business," which was exactly what it had become.

But such phrases, like the demand for Mellon's head, provoked violent reactions from men like General MacArthur, who believed that the national security was endangered. The well-to-do were becoming genuinely afraid of the hungry, and that fear does much to explain a sudden attack upon one Democratic leader by a former friend in the spring of 1932. Alfred E. Smith, born in an East Side tenement, had become a checker in the Fulton Fish Market at the age of fifteen and had risen through Tammany's ranks to become governor of New York. In 1928, during Al Smith's unsuccessful campaign against Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt had been elected to succeed him in Albany. "After I left Albany," Smith said later, "after living in a mansion for six years, I couldn't see First Avenue very well, so I went over to Fifth Avenue. I signed a lease for \$10,000 a year." Smith had been riding around Manhattan in a chauffeured limousine since the Crash, a director of banks and insurance companies, a crony of tycoons, the president of the Empire State Building. He had found a new level, a higher level, and he liked it.

Then, on Thursday, April 7, 1932, the nation heard a new voice over a nationwide hookup—the warm, vibrant, confident voice of Franklin Roosevelt. The governor denounced the Hoover administration for relieving the big banks and corporations. He mocked "shallow thinkers" who knew no way to help the farmer. "These unhappy times," he said, "call for the building of plans that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid."

Smith exploded at a Jefferson Day dinner. Flushed and hoarse, he said,

"This country is sick and tired of listening to political campaign orators who tell us what is the matter with us," and that "this is no time for demagogues. I will take off my coat and vest and fight to the end any man who persists in any demagogic appeal to the masses of the working people of this country to destroy themselves by setting class against class and rich against poor!"

In retrospect Smith's outburst appears extraordinary both in its virulence and in the mildness of the sentiment which had triggered it. The governor had, after all, merely suggested that something be done for the starving poor.

The Roosevelt for President campaign was then being waged from an inconspicuous office at 331 Madison Avenue in New York City, and it was not going well. Since his smashing gubernatorial victory FDR had been the Democratic front runner, but as the convention approached he was losing ground rapidly. His most devoted subordinate was sixty-one-year-old Louis McHenry Howe, an uncomely little ex-newspaperman who liked to answer the telephone by saying, "This is the medieval gnome speaking." Many out-of-state politicians were repelled by him. But then, there wasn't much about the Roosevelt candidacy that critics found attractive. On the right, Bernard Baruch called the governor "wish-washy," Boss Frank Hague of Jersey City said he had "no chance of winning in November," and the Scripps-Howard newspapers, coming out for Al Smith, said, "In Franklin Roosevelt we have another Hoover."

He was the only leader in either party who had suggested progressive solutions for the national dilemma, yet the liberal abuse of him was even harsher. Heywood Brown, Elmer Davis, and Walter Lippmann scorned him. The *New Republic* dismissed him as "not a man of great intellectual force or supreme moral stamina." In an open letter to Roosevelt on May 11, editor Oswald Garrison Villard of the *Nation* wrote: "You have deeply stabbed the faith that is within Americans that an emergency brings a leader, that our institutions are to survive." Riffing through pre-convention issues of the *Nation* one finds such anti-Roosevelt comments as ". . . there is small hope for better things in his candidacy" . . . "his candidacy arouses so little real enthusiasm" . . . "no evidence whatever that people are turning to him as a leader" . . . "weakness and readiness to compromise" . . . "To put into the Presidency at this hour another weak man in the place of Herbert Hoover would be all the more disastrous because of the mistaken idea that Franklin D. Roosevelt is really a liberal," and, picking up the Scripps-Howard refrain, "A Hoover, perhaps, by any other name is still a Hoover."

To win the Democratic nomination under the convention rules of 1932, a candidate needed two-thirds of the votes. Smith quickly became the leader of the coalition opposing FDR; both men entered the Massachusetts primary late in April, and Smith gave Roosevelt a beating, capturing all of

the state's thirty-six convention votes. The popular margin was three to one. The following month red-baiting John Nance Garner, Speaker of the House and Hearst's candidate, carried the California primary by 60,000 votes, with FDR second and Smith a strong third. There was only one way Roosevelt could win the convention now, and that was by dealing with the bosses. Late in June the Democrats gathered in Chicago — where two weeks earlier the Republicans had renominated Hoover, after a delegate who wanted to nominate Coolidge had been muscled from the hall by Chicago policemen — and Howe began spinning his web from suite 1502 in the Congress Hotel. "What's your price?" he asked former Governor Harry Byrd of Virginia. Byrd said he wanted to be a U.S. Senator. "Is that your price?" the medieval gnome demanded. Byrd said that was it. Virginia already had two Democratic senators, but Howe said, "Very well. We'll put either Glass or Swanson in Franklin's cabinet." Politicians in those days were very direct.

Down at the podium of the Chicago Stadium John E. Mack was about to deliver a lackluster speech putting Roosevelt's name in nomination. Already the party had adopted an appalling platform promising a 25 percent reduction in federal spending, a balanced budget, loyalty to the gold standard, laissez-faire economics, and, its saving grace, repeal of Prohibition. The Roosevelt supporters didn't even have a theme song. Smith had preempted "The Sidewalks of New York." Since the governor's home town of Hyde Park didn't have sidewalks anyhow, Howe had decided to use "Anchors Aweigh" as a tribute to his man's naval service. While the judge approached the podium, Howe's secretary burst in on him and said "Anchors Aweigh" wouldn't do at all; it was being used in a radio commercial for a cigarette company. Instead she suggested a song written the year of the Crash for the MGM film *Chasing Rainbows*. She skipped up and down the bedroom of suite 1502, humming and snapping her fingers. Warily agreeing, Howe picked up the phone and said, "Tell them to play 'Happy Days Are Here Again,'" thus giving a generation of Democrats its anthem. The judge finished, the demonstration began, and from the cheap pipe organ came:

*Happy days are here again!
The skies above are clear again!
Let's all sing a song of cheer again —
Happy days — are — here — a-gain!*

Although rousing, it wasn't enough; after three ballots the convention was still deadlocked. Some Roosevelt delegates were wavering. Under the unit rule the switch of a single vote in the Mississippi caucus would mean the loss of the entire state. The Roosevelt floor managers, led by a Long Island politician named Jim Farley, promised Garner the Vice Presidency. William Randolph Hearst was afraid that disintegration of FDR strength would bring in a League of Nations advocate, and on his advice Garner accepted the deal. From Washington, Garner phoned Sam Rayburn, his

man on the floor. California switched — and the galleries, packed with Smith men, erupted in rage. Smith's delegates refused to make the party's choice unanimous; instead they ran around tearing up Roosevelt posters. Will Rogers said, "Ah! They was Democrats today. They fought, they fit, they split and adjourned in a dandy wave of dissension. That's the old Democratic spirit." Others were less kind. Heywood Broun jeered that Roosevelt was the "corkscrew candidate of a convoluting convention." H. L. Mencken wrote in the *Baltimore Sun* that the Democrats had picked their weakest candidate. The *San Francisco Chronicle* concurred, and so, during his daily medicine-ball workout with friends next morning, did President Hoover. They nodded; one assured him that the country was still conservative. Another said it was inconceivable that voters would elect a hopeless cripple. Already that whispering campaign had begun.

Roosevelt flew to Chicago in a trimotor Ford, writing his acceptance speech on the two-stop, turbulent, nine-hour flight from Albany. No one had ever accepted a presidential nomination with such alacrity, but this nominee believed that the Depression called for all sorts of unprecedented action; standing before the convention, his leg braces locked in place, he said he hoped the Democratic party would make it its business to break "absurd traditions." He cried, "I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a New Deal for the American people." Some delegates thought the phrase a brilliant combination of Theodore Roosevelt's Square Deal and Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom. Reporters, however, were discovering that FDR was a great borrower. "The forgotten man" had come from a speech delivered by William Graham Sumner in 1883, and Stuart Chase had just published a book entitled *A New Deal*. Roosevelt didn't much care about the genesis of a word, an idea, or a program. His statecraft was summed up in a speech at Oglethorpe University, when he said, "The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. . . . Above all, try something." He had already begun recruiting college professors to generate suggestions. James Kieran of the *New York Times* called them "the brains trust"; then everyone else, Roosevelt included, borrowed *that* and shortened it to "brain trust."

If one definition of genius is an infinite capacity to make use of everyone and everything, the Democratic nominee certainly qualified. He reminded John Gunther of "a kind of universal joint, or rather a switchboard, a transformer," through which the energy and intelligence of other people flowed. Within a year he would become obscured by the mists of legend, but as a candidate he was still seen as mortal — a big, broad-shouldered man of fifty whose paralyzed legs were partially offset by his long arms and huge, hairy, freckled hands. His hair was gray and thin, and he had a small paunch, deep blue eyes set close together over permanent brown shadows, and two long wrinkles that formed parenthetical curves around his mouth. Undoubtedly his breeding as a country gentleman, guided by the old-fashioned morality of Groton headmaster Endicott Peabody, contributed immeasur-

ably to his inner strength; he was perhaps the only politician in the country who thought of economics as a *moral* problem. Rooseveltian confidence was striking — someone said “he must have been psychoanalyzed by God” — and so was his memory. He remembered Italian streets and buildings he hadn’t seen since his youth. Once in wartime a ship sank off Scotland; either it had been torpedoed or it had struck a rock. FDR said it was probably the rock, and then proceeded to reel off the height of the tide at that season on that coast and the extent to which that particular rock would be submerged. One of his favorite performances (and he was always a showman) was to ask a visitor to draw a line in any direction across an outline map of the United States; he would then name, in order, every county the line crossed. He was an apostle of progress; as soon as he saw the Sahara he wanted to irrigate it. Now in a world bereft of progressive action he was already a world figure. In Brussels *Demain* was investigating his horoscope. Among other things, the astrologers found excessive idealism, zeal for too rapid reformation, and “great good judgment.” After 1941 he would be in danger of accidents.

He was telling the country that “to accomplish anything worthwhile . . . there must be a compromise between the ideal and the practical.” That wasn’t at all what the ideologues wanted to hear. Roosevelt, Harold Laski sneered, was “a pill to cure an earthquake.” Lippmann called him too soft, too eager to please and be all things to all men. The country yearned for a Messiah, Ernest K. Lindley reported, and Mr. Roosevelt did not “look or sound like a Messiah.” John Dewey felt the argument that Governor Roosevelt was the lesser of two evils was “suicidal.” Organized labor, such as it was, refused to endorse any candidate.

Disenchantment with the two major parties ran high. Will Rogers concluded, “The way most people feel, they would like to vote against all of them if it was possible.” In Kansas, Republican gubernatorial candidate Alfred M. Landon was threatened by a third-party adventurer named Dr. John “Goat Glands” Brinkley; in California, District Attorney Earl Warren of Alameda County, running for reelection, was threatened by a half-dozen crank candidates. In FDR’s own party he had the dubious honor of receiving support from Huey Long, the pasha of Louisiana, who packed a gun and who, in Roosevelt’s private opinion, was one of the two most dangerous men in the country. (The other was General MacArthur.)

Lippmann saw “no issue of fundamental principle” between Roosevelt and Hoover, and defections on the left were particularly heavy. “If I vote at all,” said Lewis Mumford, “it will be for the Communists. It is Communism which desires to save civilization.” Professor Paul H. Douglas of the University of Chicago, later to become a brilliant ornament of the Democratic party, declared then that its destruction would be “one of the best things that could happen in our political life.” John Chamberlain wrote in September that progressivism “must mean either Norman Thomas or William Z. Foster, ineffectual though one or both may be.” Thomas sup-

porters included Stephen Vincent Benét, Reinhold Niebuhr, Stuart Chase, Elmer Davis, Morris Ernst, and the editors of both the *New Republic* and the *Nation*. Villard continued his litany of the left; of Roosevelt he wrote: “He has spoken of the ‘forgotten man,’ but nowhere is there a real, passionate, ringing exposition of just what it is that the forgotten man has been deprived of or what should be done for him. . . . we can see in him no leader, and no evidence anywhere that he can rise to the needs of this extraordinary hour.”

This was overstated, but when TRB wrote in the *New Republic* of “the pussyfooting policy of Roosevelt’s campaign,” and *Time* said the governor “emerged from the campaign fog as a vigorous well-intentioned gentleman of good birth and breeding” who “lacked crusading convictions,” they were reading the record correctly. The candidate delivered only one really radical speech, to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco on September 23. It was not repeated. His own convictions at this time were largely conservative; he believed in the gold standard, a balanced budget, and unregulated business competition. Moreover, he had to hold his party together. For every Huey Long on the left there were ten men like Al Smith, who said, “We should stop talking about the Forgotten Man and about class distinctions” and Garner, who sent word to Roosevelt that if he went too far with “wild-eyed ideas” they would have “the shit kicked out of us.” FDR didn’t go too far. His speeches were laced with ambiguities and contradictions. Many passages seem to reflect a shallow optimism, and one address, delivered in Pittsburgh, was a dreadful blunder. Among the new members of his brain trust was General Hugh S. “Ironpants” Johnson, a friend of Baruch’s who had been Douglas MacArthur’s classmate at West Point and had later shared a tent with George Patton on the Mexican border. As a child he had chanted, “Everybody’s a rink-stink but Hughie Johnson and he’s all right.” That was still his attitude; to him the other brain-trusters were rink-stinks, and during their absence from the campaign train he persuaded the Democratic standard-bearer to embrace the platform plank calling for a 25 percent slash in the federal budget. FDR would hear about that four years later.

But his audiences were less interested in his stand on tariffs and the power business than in taking the measure of the man, and what they saw was a magnificent leader — his leonine head thrown back, his eye flashing, his cigarette holder tilted at the sky, his navy boat cloak falling gracefully from his great shoulders. He was the image of zest, warmth, and dignity; he was always smiling; he always called people “my friends.” If his speeches were inadequate as statements of public policy, politically they were brilliant. Editors read, “The only real capital of the nation is its natural resources and its human beings,” and they groaned. Voters felt the governor’s obvious sincerity and were moved. To them his messages were lucid, specific, and illumined by homely metaphors. He cared about people. They could feel that. And the campaign was as much of an education for

him as for them. Heading westward across the plains, he realized for the first time just how desperate the country's economic situation had become. "I have looked into the faces of thousands of Americans," he told a friend. "... They have the frightened look of lost children."

Meanwhile, back at the White House, Herbert Hoover had come alive. Roosevelt's speeches hadn't done it. The *Literary Digest* poll predicting a Roosevelt victory may have helped; so may the gambling odds, which were running seven to one against the President. The real shock, however, came from Maine. Maine still voted in September then, and when the ballots were counted it turned out that the state had elected a Democratic governor and two Democratic Congressmen — the first such slippage from the GOP since the Civil War. Hoover had carried forty states in 1928; he was bewildered. He told his secretary that this meant "we have got to fight to the limit." Earlier he had said that in four months of campaigning Roosevelt would lose the confidence of business, which in some mysterious way would, he thought, decide the election. Such firms as the Ford Motor Company had in fact notified their employees that "To prevent times from getting worse and to help them get better, President Hoover must be elected." But apparently workers weren't listening to their employers. Furthermore, there had been several startling desertions from Republican ranks, notably Senators Borah of Idaho and Hiram Johnson of California.

So Hoover put on his high-button shoes and celluloid collar and went to the people. He was lucky to come back alive. He deliberately chose the low road; to a member of his cabinet he confided that there was "hatred" for him in the country, and that the only way to win was to incite "a fear of what Roosevelt will do." In Des Moines he said of his tariff, "The grass will grow in the streets of a hundred cities, a thousand towns; the weeds will overrun the fields of millions of farms if that protection is taken away." They jeered and paraded Hoovercarts bearing signs that read, WE'LL GET THERE REGARDLESS OF HOOVER, AND THIS AIN'T NO BULL. In Indianapolis he told listeners that Roosevelt was peddling "nonsense . . . misstatements . . . prattle . . . untruths . . . defamation . . . ignorance . . . calumnies," and they hissed. In Cleveland he promised that no "deserving" citizen would starve, and they hooted. In St. Paul, referring to the rout of the bonus marchers, he said, "Thank God we still have a government in Washington that still knows how to deal with a mob," and the crowd replied with one vast snarl. Detroit was the worst. The city was carrying a quarter-million people on its relief rolls. At the station he was greeted with boos and catcalls. Mounted police, swinging batons, scattered the throng, but all along his limousine route tens of thousands more shouted "Hang Hoover!" and shook their fists. Signs read, DOWN WITH HOOVER, SLAYER OF VETERANS!; BILLIONS FOR BANKERS, BULLETS FOR VETS. Afterward a Secret Serviceman told a reporter, "I've been traveling with Presidents since Teddy Roosevelt's time, and never before have I seen one actually booed, with men running out

into the streets to thumb their noses at him. It's not a pretty sight." Chief Agent Sterling looked at Hoover and saw a man stricken. The President could hardly talk. By now people were throwing eggs and tomatoes at his train as it moved across the stricken land. He didn't know what else to do, so he phoned Calvin Coolidge.

Coolidge said his throat was bothering him and, what's more, "I find it terribly hard to know what to say." His difficulty was understandable. In Northampton, Massachusetts, his own bank was collapsing. Finally he agreed to speak in Madison Square Garden. Republicans thought the magic of his name would pack the Garden. Instead fewer than a third of the seats were filled, and frantic ushers ran outside begging passersby to come hear the country's only living ex-President. Inside, the party faithful gave him a two-minute ovation which he throttled by holding out his watch, showing that the cheers had wasted \$340 of radio time. "That's Cal!" someone shouted. But it wasn't the Cal of old, nor was this the kind of audience he had known. He said, "The Republican party believes in encouraging business in order that the benefits from such business may minister to the welfare of the ordinary run of people." He waited for applause. There was silence. He began another sentence, "When I was in Washington —" and they roared with laughter. Baffled, he shook his head. No one had ever laughed at a Coolidge speech before. He stumbled through the text and went home declaring himself "burned-out"; in fifteen weeks he would be dead.

Now the party in power was really desperate. The Secretary of Agriculture maligned the New York governor as "a common garden variety of liar"; the Secretary of the Navy predicted, "If Roosevelt is elected, the homes and lives of a hundred million Americans might be in danger." Hoover cried, "My countrymen! The fundamental issue that will fix the national direction for one hundred years to come is whether we shall go in fidelity to American traditions or whether we shall turn to innovations." His shoulders sagged, the crow's-feet about his eyes deepened, the lines around his mouth grew harder. In his final radio plea to the electorate he premonished against "false gods arrayed in the rainbow colors of promises," and William Allen White noted "how infinitely tired" his voice was and "how hollow and how sad in disillusion" his words had become.

The contrast with Governor Roosevelt could not have been greater. "You may not have universally agreed with me, but you have universally been kind to me," FDR said to his radio audience; "... Out of this unity that I have seen we may build the strongest strand to lift ourselves out of this Depression." He was magnanimous and sure of himself, and no presidential challenger ever had better reason. Sitting in Democratic headquarters in New York on election night at the Hotel Biltmore, his Phi Beta Kappa key gleaming on his dark blue vest, he listened to reports of the growing avalanche until, at 12:17 A.M., Hoover conceded. The President-elect had car-

ried 42 of the 48 states — all but Connecticut, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Delaware, and Pennsylvania — and had won 472 electoral votes; the “President-reject,” as *Time* cruelly called him, had but 59. It was the greatest victory in a two-party presidential race since Lincoln beat McClellan 212 to 21, though there were those who noted that the popular vote for Norman Thomas had jumped from 267,240 to 728,860. Louis Howe broke out a twenty-year-old bottle of sherry. Three babies born that night at Brooklyn’s Beth-El Hospital were named Franklin Delano Mayblum, Franklin Delano Finkelstein, and Franklin Delano Ragin.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt retired to his town house at 49 East Sixty-fifth Street, where his mother embraced him and said elatedly, “This is the greatest moment of my life.” Her son, however, seemed to have lost some of his campaign assurance. Upstairs his twenty-five-year-old son lifted him into bed, leaned over, and kissed him goodnight. Looking up, the President-elect said, “You know, Jimmy, all my life I have been afraid of only one thing — fire. Tonight I think I’m afraid of something else.” The young man asked, “Afraid of what, Pa?” and his father replied, “I’m just afraid that I may not have the strength to do this job.”

Next morning, propped in bed, he was heartened by the nation’s editorial comment. Even the *Chicago Tribune* said that his “personality and his ideas pleased the people. They were impressed by his good will and good faith.” Those qualities were there, but they could not be traded upon. He had not won the Presidency without a shrewd eye for hidden motives, and he needed it that morning. Hoover’s congratulatory telegram had arrived; it must be answered. At first he wrote on the back of it that he was prepared “to cooperate with you” in the months ahead. Then he paused and struck that out. In its place he scrawled that he was “ready to further in every way the common purpose to help our country.” In 1932 Presidents were not inaugurated until March 4. A four-month interregnum lay ahead. He had a hunch that Hoover would try to tie him to the discredited policies of the outgoing administration, and he was right.

On December 5 the lame-duck 72nd Congress limped back to Capitol Hill, and those of its members who were under the impression that the rout of the BEF had frightened jobless families away from Washington were in for a shock. Over 2,500 men, women, and children greeted them at the Capitol steps, chanting, “Feed the hungry, tax the rich! Feed the hungry, tax the rich!” The District’s new police commissioner had orders not to humor such wraiths, and he followed them scrupulously. Policemen with gas guns and riot guns defended the Hill, then rounded up the throng and herded it down New Jersey Avenue to Camp Meigs, a wartime cantonment on New York Avenue. The commissioner told the press he had concentrated his wards in a “detention camp.” Their guards ridiculed them and denied them water, food, medical attention or even the right to dig toilets; a Wisconsin congressman reported to his constituents that he had

seen policemen deliberately provoking people. After huddling on the frozen ground for forty-eight hours, the prisoners were released. Leaving, they sang the newly learned words:

*Arise, ye prisoners of starvation
Arise, ye wretched of the earth
For justice thunders condemnation
A better world’s in birth. . . .*

Throughout the early Thirties, and especially in the months bracketing the last session of the 72nd Congress, the sound of famished men on the march was heard from coast to coast. In New York thirty-five thousand men and women packed Union Square to hear Communist party orators. Crowds in Oklahoma City, Minneapolis, and St. Paul broke into groceries and meat markets to rifle shelves. Feelings of desperation were still internalized in most men (the suicide rate tripled that winter) but more and more mobs were beginning to coalesce. In Lincoln, Nebraska, four thousand men occupied the statehouse, another five thousand took over Seattle’s ten-story County-City Building, and five thousand Chicago teachers, tormented beyond endurance, stormed the city’s banks. The strains of “L’Internationale” were becoming increasingly familiar to the jobless; a forty-two-year-old radical named Louis Budenz led the Ohio Unemployed League mass march on the Columbus statehouse. His slogan was: “We must take control of the government and establish a workers’ and farmers’ republic.”

The sense of institutions, authority, and private property — the intuitive discipline which Daniel Patrick Moynihan would later call “the glue that holds societies together” — was showing signs of disintegration. The tax strikes and the bootleg mining of company coal seams were ominous; so was the frequency with which empty lots were being gardened without their owners’ consent, and the scattered, aimless rioting in Detroit, where relief had simply stopped. Some communities quit. Key West, Florida, was going into bankruptcy; there was no money to pay the sanitation department, and whole streets were filling up with rubbish and garbage. Here and there the starving were muttering violence. The mayor of a Massachusetts town, watching two thousand idle men milling around his city hall, wrote that “a spark might change them into a mob.” Governor O. Max Gardner of North Carolina warned of the danger of “violent social and political revolution.” Mayor Anton Cermak of Chicago, faced with the state’s reluctance to appropriate funds for the city’s six hundred thousand out-of-work men, told the legislature, “Call out the troops before you close the relief stations.”

The well-fed were edgy. Company men in employment offices became curt, bank tellers nervous, elected officials quicker to call the police, policemen faster with the nightstick. Henry Ford had always been a pacifist. Now he carried a gun. In Richmond, Virginia, a delegation from

the local Unemployed Council called on Mayor J. Fulmer Bright a few days after Thanksgiving; the mayor told his police chief, "Take these men by the scruff of the neck and the seat of the pants and throw them out." Jittery company guards killed four miners in Pennsylvania's Fayette County. New York ordered the apple sellers off its sidewalks, and John P. O'Brien, the new occupant of Gracie Mansion, promised his city, "You're going to have a mayor with a chin and fight in him. I'll preserve the metropolis from the Red Army." Plainclothesmen swinging truncheons waded into a Union Square rally; the *New York Times* reported "screams of women and cries of men with bloody heads and faces." Oklahoma City police used tear gas to break up meetings. Seattle police evicted the squatters from its County-City Building with fire hoses. Chicago law enforcement officers clubbed the unpaid teachers with billies, two of them holding one middle-aged woman while a third smashed her face.

Testifying before a Senate committee about the "sporadic uprisings in a number of our industrial cities," an AFL spokesman said that "the great bulk of those people know nothing about Communism. They wanted bread." To the propertied classes, the distinction was irrelevant. As Robert Sherwood wrote, the way ahead seemed to be clouded by "black doubt, punctured by brief flashes of ominous light, whose revelations are not comforting." If the government could not keep order, each man must look to his own. Businessmen in a number of cities formed committees to cope with nameless terrors should railroad and telephone lines be cut and surrounding highways blocked. Candles and canned goods were stockpiled; a Hollywood director carried with him a wardrobe of old clothes so that he could "disappear into the crowd" on a moment's notice. In New York, hotels discovered that wealthy guests who usually leased suites for the winter were holing up in their country homes. Some had mounted machine guns on their roofs.

They weren't paranoid. The evidence strongly suggests that had Roosevelt in fact been another Hoover, the United States would have followed seven Latin American countries whose governments had been overthrown by Depression victims. Charles M. Schwab was one of many tycoons who believed revolution was just around the corner. The dean of the Harvard Business School said, "Capitalism is on trial and on the issue of this trial may depend the whole future of Western civilization." Articles debating the imminence of revolt appeared in the *Yale Review*, *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, the *American Mercury*, and the *Atlantic*. Norman Thomas later said of the period "between the popular election and the inauguration" that "never before or since have I heard so much open and bitter cynicism about democracy and the American system."

There was a great deal of disagreement about which form of government the United States should adopt. Most intellectuals had turned leftward. Socialism to them was the middle of the road; John Dos Passos scornfully compared it to drinking near beer. Those who openly espoused Com-

munist included Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, Erskine Caldwell, Malcolm Cowley, Lincoln Steffens, Granville Hicks, Clifton Fadiman, Upton Sinclair, and Edmund Wilson, who urged taking "Communism away from the Communists," and subsequently added that Russia was "the moral top of the world where the light really never goes out." William Allen White called the Soviet Union "the most interesting place on the planet." *New Russia's Primer* was a Book-of-the-Month Club choice; it compared American chaos with Russian order. "Those rascals in Russia," said Will Rogers, "... have got mighty good ideas. . . . Just think of everybody in a country going to work." Elmer Davis said the profit system was dead. Even Scott Fitzgerald was reading Marx and writing, "To bring on the revolution, it may be necessary to work inside the Communist Party." Stuart Chase asked in *A New Deal*, "Why should Russians have all the fun of remaking a world?" More than one man in office flirted with the left. Governor Theodore G. Bilbo of Mississippi confessed, "I'm getting a little pink myself," and Governor Floyd B. Olson of Minnesota, more forthright, told a *Washingtonian* to go back "and tell 'em Olson is taking recruits for the Minnesota National Guard, and he isn't taking anybody who doesn't carry a Red Card." To be sure he wasn't misunderstood he added, "Minnesota is a left-wing state."

But the greater danger lay at the other end of the political spectrum. Intellectuals lacked power, and Bilbo and Olson were political eccentrics. The money, the influence, and Secretary of War Hurley were on the right. As early as 1931 the administration had resisted attempts to reduce troop levels because the cut would "lessen our means of maintaining domestic peace and order," and that September the American Legion had passed a resolution asserting that the economic crisis could not be "promptly and efficiently met by existing political methods." The "American Fascist [*sic*] Association and Order of Black Shirts" had been founded in Atlanta, and although its name was unpopular — asked if fascism would come to America, Huey Long said, "Sure, but here it will be called anti-fascism" — the Black Shirts had been joined by Silver Shirts, White Shirts, Khaki Shirts, the Minute Men, and the American Nationalists. A secret clique of reserve army officers was reported ready to act if the new President proved ineffective. General Smedley D. Butler testified that a New York bond salesman had attempted to recruit him for the right with an offer of \$18,000 in cash. Nicholas Murray Butler told his students that totalitarian regimes brought forth "men of far greater intelligence, far stronger character, and far more courage than the system of elections," and if anyone represented the American establishment then it was Dr. Butler, with his Nobel Prize, his thirty-four honorary degrees, and his thirty-year tenure as president of Columbia University.

Who else was prepared to sacrifice constitutional government for this vision of expanded intelligence, character, and virility? Apart from the president of Columbia and General Butler's bond salesman, few came out

for totalitarianism as such, but plenty advocated the principle. Governor Landon of Kansas declared, "Even the iron hand of a national dictator is in preference to a paralytic stroke." Congressman Hamilton Fish Jr. of New York said in 1932, "If we don't give it [dictatorship] under the existing system, the people will change the system." In February 1933 he wrote the President-elect that he and his fellow Republicans were ready to "give you any power you may need." Al Smith thought the Constitution ought to be wrapped up and laid "on the shelf" until the crisis was over. *Vanity Fair*, whose associate editors included Clare Boothe Brokaw (later Luce), demanded, "Appoint a dictator!" Walter Lippmann wanted to give the President full power at the expense of Congress; "the danger," he said, "is not that we shall lose our liberties, but that we shall not be able to act with the necessary speed and comprehensiveness," and Republican Senator David A. Reed said outright, "If this country ever needed a Mussolini, it needs one now."

In a *New Yorker* cartoon a girl at a Greenwich Village party told a limp young man, "Oh, it's all very simple. Our little group simply seizes the powerhouses and the radio station." That was where the danger lay, most people thought; in the cities. Secretary Hurley was believed to be concentrating the few troops he had near metropolitan areas, but rebellious populations have a way of outfoxing authority, and the opening revolt came where it was least expected. Farmers had always been considered the most conservative of Americans, yet it was in Republican Iowa — Hoover's home state — that sunburned men of native stock first reached for their pitchforks and shotguns. They were finally taking up arms against a system which paid them two cents a quart for milk that distributors sold for eight cents in Sioux City.

Under the leadership of Milo Reno, a sixty-four-year-old former president of the Iowa Farmers Union, they blocked all ten highways leading into the city. Spiked telegraph poles and logs were laid across the roads. Only milk for hospitals was allowed to pass. Other trucks were stopped and the milk cans emptied into ditches or taken into town and distributed free. Sympathetic telephone operators warned the insurgent farmers of approaching convoys an hour in advance; sheriffs were disarmed and their pistols and badges thrown into cornfields. Route 20 became known as Bunker Hill 20. Peering at Mary Heaton Vorse of *Harper's* from under the brim of a ten-cent straw hat, an old man said, "They say blockading the highway's illegal. I says, 'Seems to me there was a tea party in Boston that was illegal too.'"

The movement spread until Des Moines, Council Bluffs, and Omaha were isolated. In Wisconsin, embattled farmers invaded a dairy three times in one day, dumped 34,000 pounds of milk on the ground, and poured gasoline in the vats. A congressional subcommittee heard Oscar Ameringer of Oklahoma City describe a conversation with a rancher whom he had known to be conservative. The man had said, "We've got to have a revolution here like they had in Russia." Ameringer had asked him how he pro-

posed to do it, and the man had replied, "We will have four hundred machine guns . . . batteries of artillery, tractors and munitions and rifles and everything else needed to supply a pretty good army. . . . If there are enough fellows with guts in this country to do like us, we will march eastward and we will cut the East off. We will cut the East off from the West. We have got the granaries; we have the hogs, the cattle, the corn, and the East has nothing but mortgages on our places. We will show them what we can do." Ameringer told the House Labor Committee, "I have heard much of this talk from serious-minded prosperous men of other days."

Will Rogers said, "Paul Revere just woke up Concord. These birds woke up America." And on Route 20 the Iowans sang:

Let's call a farmers' holiday

A holiday let's hold;

We'll eat our wheat and ham and eggs

And let them eat their gold.

The Sioux City siege was lifted shortly after a mysterious shotgun attack on the camp of some Milo Reno followers near the town of Cherokee, forty-eight miles east of the city. He quit, and farmers surrounding the other invested cities quit with him. But Reno said, "You can no more stop this movement than you could stop the revolution. I mean the revolution of 1776." Both in their violence and their uprising they were being faithful to American tradition. And they went unpunished. At Council Bluffs sixty had been arrested, but when a thousand of their fellow insurgents marched on the jail, they were hastily released. Deciding that direct action paid, the farmers now decided to do something about mortgage foreclosures.

On the outskirts of a Kansas village police found the murdered body of a lawyer who had just foreclosed on a five-hundred-acre farm. In Cheyenne County, Nebraska, the leaders of two hundred thousand debt-ridden farmers announced that if they didn't get help from the legislature they would converge on the statehouse and raze it, brick by brick. Throughout Hoover's last winter as President there were foreclosure riots in Iowa at Storm Lake, at Primghar, in Van Buren County, and at Le Mars. The Le Mars incident was particularly ugly. Black-shirted vigilantes invaded the courtroom of Judge Charles C. Bradley, dragged him from the bench, blindfolded him, and drove him to a lonely crossroads. Their leader demanded, "Will you swear you won't sign no more mortgage foreclosures?" The judge said no. Again and again the demand was repeated, and the answer was the same. He was slapped, kicked, and knocked to the ground. A rope was tied around his neck; the other end was thrown over a roadside sign. A greasy hubcap was clapped down on his head — "That's his crown," one of the men shouted. The judge never did give his word, but though he was stripped and beaten, he declined to press prosecution afterward.

When papers had been signed, hundreds of farmers would appear at

the auction shouting, "No sale!" Prospective bidders would be shoved aside; then neighbors would buy the land for a few dollars and return it to its original owner. At one sheriff's sale a horse brought five cents, a Holstein bull five cents, three hogs another nickel, two calves four cents, and so on, until the entire property had changed hands for \$1.18. It was deeded back to the householder for ninety-nine years. Lawyers representing insurance companies in the East were kidnapped and threatened with the noose until the home office relented and agreed to a mortgage moratorium. By the end of January 1933, John A. Simpson, president of the National Farmers Union, told the Senate Committee on Agriculture, "The biggest and finest crop of revolutions you ever saw is sprouting all over this country right now." Edward A. O'Neal III, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, added, "Unless something is done for the American farmer we'll have revolution in the countryside in less than twelve months."

Here and there that troubled winter were sensitive boys now reaching the age of awareness who would, a generation later, become American leaders. Although their reactions to the world around them varied, none would ever forget the Great Depression. American history in their lifetimes would be a succession of crises, but for them this first crisis was formative.

A glance at some names is useful. In 1932 Robert F. Kennedy became seven years old; Frank Church and James Baldwin were eight; Mark Hatfield and Norman Mailer nine; John Lindsay, Nicholas Katzenbach, and Floyd McKissick ten; Whitney Young and John Glenn eleven; James Farmer, Stewart Udall, and Charles Percy twelve; Edward Brooke, George Wallace, McGeorge Bundy, and Russell Long thirteen; Billy Graham, Orville Freeman, and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. fourteen; John F. Kennedy, Robert Taft Jr., John Connally, and Lawrence F. O'Brien fifteen; Arthur Miller, Robert McNamara, Eugene McCarthy, and John Tower sixteen; David Rockefeller, Peter Dominick, Herman Wouk, Saul Bellow, Walter Heller and Theodore H. White seventeen; William Westmoreland, Tennessee Williams, Jonas Salk, and Stewart Alsop eighteen; and Gerald Ford and Richard M. Nixon nineteen.

Nixon had entered his junior year at Whittier College that autumn, majoring in history and running the fresh vegetable counter at Nixon's Market, the family store; each morning before dawn he drove to the Los Angeles Public Market to haggle with produce growers over prices. The family had enough to eat, which put Nixon in the great silent majority of eighty million Americans who were neither starving nor on relief. His collegiate status set him apart, however; fewer than one youth in eight between eighteen and twenty-two was in college, and only half had gone to high school. For millions, formal education was still confined to the one-teacher elementary school, of which there were 143,391 in the country.

If it were possible to be transported back in time to the typical middle-class neighborhood of that year, it would probably be in a city; suburban areas had begun to form, but only 18 percent of the population lived there. It was still feasible for a man and his family to live decently within walking distance of his office. Arriving on a street in the neighborhood, a visitor from the 1970s would first notice superficial differences — stop signs were yellow, mailboxes green; milk bottles thick and heavy — and then the seedy appearance of the houses. Few had been painted since 1929; often those which had been under construction had been left unfinished. On Detroit's East Jefferson Street, for example, the Elks suspended work on an eleven-story building, and its naked beams stood silhouetted against the sky for thirty-four years.

Appliances, gadgets, and creature comforts of the 1970s were rare. There were no power mowers, home air-conditioning units, automatic dishwashers, clothes driers, electric blankets, clock-radios, thermopane windows, nylons, drip-dry clothes, frozen foods, automatic coffee makers, cordless shavers, filter cigarettes, electric toothbrushes, vinyl floors, ball-point pens, electric typewriters, modern Dictaphones, Xerox machines, Styrofoam, hi-fi stereo sets, Scotch tape, home freezers, cassette recorders, color or Polaroid film, Fiberglas fishing rods, garbage disposal units, tape recorders, snow blowers, electric knives, home hair driers, electric can openers, or Muzak, and although Gilbert Seldes was predicting in *Harper's* that soon "we shall probably have the simple and comparatively inexpensive mechanisms, now being perfected, which will throw on a small screen set up beside the home radio set a moving picture projected from a central broadcasting station," there was no television, not even plain black-and-white. Somehow the middle class survived the Depression — the entire decade of the Thirties — with none of these. O Pioneers!

Most American homes were heated by hand-stoked hot air furnaces, which had to be tended twice daily. The country needed nearly 400 million tons of coal to get through a winter, and it was brought to a house by a grimy man who would back his truck to a cellar window and empty the coal down a chute into a bin near the furnace. "Refrigerator" didn't mean an *electric* refrigerator; it was an icebox, kept filled by an iceman who knew how many pounds a housewife wanted because she notified him by placing in her kitchen window a card with the figure 100, 75, 50, or 25 turned up. It was an affluent husband who bought his wife a toaster that would scorch both sides of a piece of bread simultaneously ("Our SUPREME toaster!" cried the Sears, Roebuck catalogue that year), for in most homes bread was singed in a gas oven or a coal or wood-burning "kitchen range." The stove might also be used to heat heavy sadirons for pressing clothing that had come back from the laundry rough-dried, or, in a home without hot water, for heating bucketfuls before a bath.

Phonographs had to be wound by hand; they might be called Victrolas or Gramophones, but never record players. A housewife began her heavy

cleaning by donning a dustcap, and as a rule her only mechanical help was a carpet sweeper; in December 1932, in all the houses served by the Alabama Power Company, there were exactly 185 vacuum cleaners. Most farms depended upon kerosene lamps for illumination. Electricity was available to one American farmer in every ten — in Mississippi the ratio was one in a hundred — and 90 percent of all rural families were without either bathtubs or showers. Seventy-five percent lacked indoor plumbing. Half carried their water from wells or brooks and did their laundry — and washed their children — outdoors. (For that matter, millions of urban housewives also had only a washboard to cope with the family laundry, which was usually hung out on Mondays.) Insects were always a summer problem. There was no DDT. Both on farms and in cities the only preventives were spray guns (“Quick, Henry, the Flit!”) and flypaper. A mother who wanted fruit juice for her children had to work at it. She bought Sunkist oranges and laboriously squeezed them, one by one, on an aluminum juice extractor.

Before a girl learned how to handle bobby pins — at about the same age that boys were acquiring their first long pants — her mother had explained the difference between a lady and a woman. Being a lady had certain advantages. Men opened doors for her, stood up to give her a seat on buses and streetcars, and removed their hats when she entered elevators; butchers cut her meat to order, grocers took orders over the telephone and delivered to her door, and when she had a baby she was expected to stay in bed ten days (at a total cost, including the doctor’s fee, of \$25). On the other hand, she was expected to defer to her husband; at the altar she had sworn “to love, honor, and *obey* him.” Her activities in public were circumscribed by convention. A middle-class lady could neither smoke on the street nor appear with hair curlers. In her purse she carried cosmetics in a small disc called a compact, but this, too, could be produced only in private or a ladies’ room. She never swore or told dirty jokes. (Sometimes she wondered what a lesbian was. But whom could she ask?) Advertising copywriters saw to it that she had enough worries anyway: halitosis, B.O., undie odor, office hips, paralyzed pores, pink toothbrush, ashtray breath, colon collapse, pendulosis, and athlete’s foot. Her skirts came to mid-calf. (Any woman whose hem did not cover the knee was assumed to be a prostitute.) A lady would no more leave the house without her cloche than her husband would without his snap-brim felt hat. She might squirt Ipana (for the smile-of-beauty) on her Dr. West toothbrush, and even use Tangee lipstick, but fingernail paint and hair dye were highly dubious. Hairdressers didn’t know how to use dye. Respectable women didn’t even talk about it; a clever young NYU chemistry major, who sold his home-made Clairol dye from door to door, discovered that to make ends meet he had to talk about hair “coloring.”

As a mother, the middle-class wife often had to double as a nurse. Illnesses were long and painful then. Even a visit to the dentist meant an

hour of agony; Procaine, a primitive form of Novocaine, was widely used, but it had to be mixed at the chair and was accompanied by disagreeable side effects. Thousands of patients still had to take the big burring drill straight, and since fast drills hadn’t been invented, not much could be accomplished in one visit. In many hospitals, anesthesiologists were limited to chloroform; ether would soon succeed it, though the improvement was questionable. There were no sulfa drugs and no antibiotics. Meningitis killed 95 percent of its victims; pneumonia was often fatal. Even viral infections (called “the grippe” then) were a serious business. Though hospitals were comparatively inexpensive, practically no one had hospital insurance — the American Medical Association didn’t approve Blue Cross until 1933 — so most patients remained at home, which meant with mother. She seldom had the help of medication. Ethical drugs were largely limited to a few barbiturates, notably phenobarbital. So remote was the drug nightmare of the next generation that 3,512 drug firms failed between 1932 and 1934, leaving liabilities of over 59 million dollars.

If motherhood was more difficult, it was also a greater challenge. Parents had a tremendous influence upon their children. The teen-age subculture did not exist; indeed “teenage,” as defined by Merriam-Webster, meant “brushwood used for fences and hedges.” Young people were called youngsters, and youngsters were loyal to their homes. Since the brooding omnipresence of the peer group had not yet arrived, children rarely felt any conflict between their friends and their families. No youngster would dream of discussing parental conflicts with other youngsters. If a middle-class family was going to take a drive in the country on Sunday afternoon, as it usually was, children quit the baseball or hopscotch game and hopped in the back seat. The Depression increased all family activities; a study of over a hundred white-collar and professional families in Pittsburgh discovered that a majority had increased family recreation — ping-pong, jigsaw puzzles, checkers, parlour games, bridge, and most of all listening to the radio.

As often as not, the radio was the most prominent piece of furniture in the living room. Whether an Atwater Kent, Philco, Silvertone, or Majestic set, it was likely to be a rococo console in high Grand Rapids style. Network programs were scheduled with the family in mind. Mother’s serials came during the day; news, comedians, and variety programs in the evening. Between the two was sandwiched the children’s hour, part of which might be listed in the local newspaper as:

5:15	WTIC	1040	Tom Mix
	WEAF	660	Story Man
5:30	WTIC	1040	Jack Armstrong
	WJZ	760	Singing Lady
5:45	WJZ	760	Little Orphan Annie
6:00	WOR	710	Uncle Don

In the winter of 1932-33 a young middle-class boy wore, almost as a uniform, a sheepskin-lined tan cloth coat, a knitted hat, corduroy knickers, and high-cut lace-up boots with a small pocket on the side of one of them for a jackknife. (In summertime he wore short pants and Keds.) If he was lucky, he owned a Ranger 28-inch-wheel bike with a coaster brake and cushion tires, the tires protected by Neverleak and the whole locked, when not in use, by a \$1.50 slip-shackle padlock. The times being what they were, he was very much aware of money and what it bought. A nickel would bring a three-flavored cake of brick ice cream, a Horton's Dixie Cup, a candy bar, a loaf of bread, a local telephone call, a cup of coffee, or a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, or *Liberty*. For a penny you could get candy, a pencil, a postcard, a pad of paper, a glass marble, or your best friend's thoughts.

If you had an allowance (a Sunday nickel, say) or had earned some money shoveling snow or mowing lawns at a quarter apiece, the quickest place to spend it was at the corner drugstore, drinking a Coke at one of the marble-topped, wire-legged tables, though in Youngstown, Ohio, children bought ice-cream-on-a-stick from a confectioner who drove slowly through the suburbs in a white truck, ringing a bell, and who called himself the Good Humor man. A boy who accumulated as much as fifty cents could get the latest in the Tom Swift series. As David Riesman has pointed out, the heroes of boys' literature were "ambitious. They had goals. And the reader identified with them and tried to emulate them. . . . The virtue which brought victory was frequently an ability to control the self, for instance, to be brave." Significantly, the most widely read book in middle-class homes was Charles Lindbergh's *We*.

Inner-direction (or, as Paul Elmer More then called it, "the inner check") provided children with a built-in need to achieve, though the Depression discouraged them from reaching for anything beyond their grasp. In 1931 the *Literary Digest* had conducted a survey of vocation preference among children. Boys of eight wanted to be cowboys, aviators, or army officers when they grew up; girls wanted to be movie stars. At eighteen the boys were looking forward to being lawyers, electrical engineers, or architects; eighteen-year-old girls were taking stenographic and secretarial training. Adolescence was a sobering experience. But then, it wasn't supposed to be much fun. "Childhood is so short and the balance of life so long," Dorothy Dix explained. "At best, a mother can satin-pad the world for her children for a few years. Then they are bound to face realities, and it is a bitter price they must pay for her folly in turning them into weaklings, instead of strong men and women, and making them unable to cope with the difficulties that they are inevitably destined to encounter."

One of the first lessons a child learned — because it would be a future asset when he applied for a job — was the importance of personal appearance. "Sit up *straight!*" he was told, and "Here's fifteen cents, go get a

haircut." He might prefer a Flexible Flyer sled or a Simplex typewriter, but what he got first was an \$8.95 blue serge suit comprising a coat, vest, and knickers, and a pair of black \$2.98 Gold Bond shoes. He wore them Sundays and on the first day of each semester, when every mother examined her son like a first sergeant going over his men before a white-glove inspection. (Somehow he always forgot his white handkerchief.) She wanted his new teachers to have a nice impression. It is not recorded that any child ever asked why.

To school he also brought a Masterpiece tablet, bearing on its cover a blurry reproduction of a great painting; in it he laboriously copied assignments with a big, circular Palmer Penmanship script. Seats in the classroom were frequently arranged alphabetically. The walls of at least one room would be decorated with the ruins of Pompeii or a bust of Caesar, etchings and statues which, as Riesman noted, would "signify the irrelevance of the school to the emotional needs of the child." Some of his lessons make interesting reading today. Young Lyndon Johnson had read in his geography book:

French Indo-China resembles Siam both in climate and the character of people. Its forest-covered hills yield valuable teak and ironwood, and in its valleys are extensive fields of rice and millet. Silk, cotton, tea and spices are other products and there are also extensive coal beds.

A civics textbook explained:

The child who has not learned obedience is handicapped for life. If he does not obey at home, he is not likely to observe the laws of the state, even though he helps elect the men who make them. Boys and girls who study our Government will quickly discover that obedience to authority is as necessary in a government by the people as in a monarchy.

And this paragraph appeared in Professor Thomas Marshall's widely used *American History*, published by Macmillan in 1930:

The slaves. Although he was in a state of slavery, the Negro of plantation days was usually happy. He was fond of the company of others and liked to sing, dance, crack jokes, and laugh; he admired bright colors and was proud to wear a red or yellow bandana. He wanted to be praised, and he was loyal to a kind master or overseer. He was never in a hurry, and was always ready to let things go until the morrow. Most of the planters learned that not the whip, but loyalty, based upon pride, kindness, and rewards, brought the best returns.

Nor did unreality stop there. In schools of the Thirties — including, for several years, Washington, D.C. — teachers were forbidden to so much as mention the Soviet Union. On maps the area occupied by Russia was left blank, like the many "unexplored" tracts in Africa. School days usually opened with both the pledge of allegiance to the flag and a Protestant prayer, in which Jewish and Catholic children were expected to share. God was very much alive in 1932, and he was something of a prig. There

is a great deal of social comment in *Time's* prissy review of Earl Carroll's *Vanities* that October. Like Erskine Caldwell, Carroll sorely tested the Luce tolerance: "Mr. Carroll's shows have long held the record for borderline humor. In Comedian Milton Berle is to be found the acme of hysterical vulgarity. While one part of the audience blushes and the other part guffaws, Comedian Berle proceeds to imitate a person of uncertain gender, quip about the show girls' fundaments, shout depraved announcements into a loudspeaker. He seems to get a great deal of fun out of it." What especially entertained Berle — and infuriated *Time* — was that some of the chorines appeared with their brassieres clearly visible.

Mae West appeared that year with George Raft in *Night After Night*, and there were gasps in middle-class America when, in reply to a friend's remark, "Goodness, what beautiful diamonds," Mae replied, "Goodness has nothing to do with it, dearie." Will H. Hays, then czar of all the rushes, also overlooked an exchange in Busby Berkeley's first musical, *Forty-Second Street*; one chorus girl said, "I'm afraid I gotta run," the second said, "First door on your left," and the first said, "In my stocking." Such outrageous lewdness didn't get by often. For adolescents, sex was the most forbidden of all subjects. Like the myths about bogeymen and truant officers and the lists of New Year's resolutions which were faithfully made out each January 1 and broken within a week, the treatment of sex information virtually assured massive guilt feelings. Every growing boy knew masturbation led to brain damage and, in time, to the growth of hair on the palms of his hands.

Girls similarly worried over who had the reputation for being the "hottest" or "dirtiest" girl in school. Their difficulties were increased by the fact that the world of adolescence was largely male chauvinist. Girls were rarely invited to go bike riding, swap steelies or gum cards, discuss the Cleveland National Air Races, or play mumblety-peg, king-of-the-mountain, capture-the-flag, or (unless they were sisters or tomboys) ringolevio. A boy and girl might hold a strained conversation about the relative merits of the Ipana Troubadors, the Cliquot Club Eskimos, and the A & P Gypsies, but girls were largely spectators who emitted squeals during the great annual festival of July 4, when the anniversary of independence was celebrated by firing Bangsite cannon, hurling torpedos at the sidewalk, and blowing up tin cans with two-inchers and cherry bombs.

Middle-class parents who could afford it — and at eight dollars a week the cost was not prohibitive — sent their children away for at least part of the summer, if only because of the annual polio terror. When an epidemic of infantile paralysis struck, people stayed home from movies and meetings; some wouldn't even appear outdoors without gauze masks. Thus many a middle-class city child learned to swim at a Scout or YMCA camp, came to love the scent of honeysuckle and the flight of fireflies and June bugs around a campfire, and was told the sound of katydids in August meant frost in six weeks.

Sometimes the whole family would strap suitcases on the running boards of the new Chevrolet (\$445, F.O.B. Detroit) and go "touring." Touring was an adventure, with real hazards. The spare tire mounted on the back of a roadster or a sedan was frequently needed, and with the tires of that era a blowup was a real explosion. Automobiles were uncomfortable. Meals in "roadhouses" were of uncertain quality. Overnight rest was difficult; rooms were hard to find. According to the American Automobile Association, the average American on tour spent a week getting to where he was going and a week coming back, which seems like a lot of touring until you realize that on the roads of that day he could average only 234 miles a day. Route 1 went right through the center of Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Boston; you had to use ferries at the Delaware River and the Hudson (the George Washington Bridge was still under construction); and in Maine, Depression winters had left the roads high-crowned and weak-shouldered. Speed traps were everywhere. There were no interstate highways. The only way you could drive coast to coast from the east was to take route 30 (the Lincoln Highway) into the center of Chicago, where you picked up route 66. Both were two-lane roads, both had stretches of unpaved dirt, and 66 traversed the Rockies with ungraded hairpin curves.

If all this sounds a trifle primitive, it must be added that, as Caroline Bird has pointed out, certain aspects of American society then could be quite pleasant. To be sure, you needed money, but not a great deal; an income of \$5,000 or \$6,000, or even less, brought comforts unknown today. The middle-class world was much quieter. There were no sonic booms, high-impact rock drills, air compressors, chain saw, hi-fi sets, tape recorders, playback units or 125-decibel rock groups, and very few riveters. It was more private. The FBI had fewer than three million fingerprints, and the digital society of social security numbers, zip codes, direct distance dialing, and credit card memory banks was unknown. Getting into college was relatively easy. Only thirty-five thousand applicants took college boards in 1932. If you preferred to fly the scheduling was primitive, but passengers received first-class service — the labor market being what it was, airlines could require extra effort from their R.N. stewardesses.

You never needed reservations at hotels, fine restaurants, hairdressing emporia, or hospitals. Nobody worried about pollution; factory chimneys were cold. Tutors, barbers, dressmakers, music teachers, and even physicians came to your house. If you worked in an office, secretaries arrived on time in the morning. They didn't disappear for coffee breaks, didn't make personal telephone calls from the office, and didn't object to working overtime. "The best guarantee of efficiency is a long line at the factory gate," was the way Samuel Insull put it (he would), but John Kenneth Galbraith stated the principle less cruelly. The more retrograde an economy becomes, he said, the more service improves.

Apart from amenities, the most cheerful feature of life then, as seen from the 1970s, lay abroad. Not only was America untroubled by foreign crises; as far as the vast majority of Americans were concerned, there were no foreign affairs at all. The Japanese were behaving badly in China, but who had time for that? In the German presidential elections eighty-four-year-old Paul von Hindenburg defeated forty-three-year-old Adolf Hitler. Americans were bored by both. In London the Prince of Wales made a date with a Mrs. Wallis Simpson, who had just been presented at court, but of course nothing could come of it because she already had a husband. Saigon was so remote that Hollywood used it as the background for *Red Dust*, an escapist film starring Clark Gable. The Middle East was quieter than the Middle West; as *Time* reported on April 4, the Jewish population of Palestine was "a minority (16.9 percent) without political power, save for the advisory powers conferred on the Jewish Agency by the mandate allotted to Great Britain ten years ago."

Although the decade was two years old, many figures who would later be identified with the 1930s were still relatively obscure. The name of Winston Churchill appeared in print as the author of *Amid These Storms*, an anti-Communist tract. (Other authors of 1932 were William Faulkner, Christopher Morley, Aldous Huxley, John Dos Passos, Robinson Jeffers, T. S. Stribling, Hendrik Willem van Loon, James M. Barrie, and Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall.) The men whose birthdays were matters of public note — e.g., George Bernard Shaw, Rudyard Kipling, George M. Cohan, and John Galsworthy — belong in memory to an earlier age. This was particularly true in the world of entertainment. The five top box office stars were Marie Dressler, Janet Gaynor, Joan Crawford, Charles Farrell, and Greta Garbo. Irene Dunne had just made her film debut; so had Claudette Colbert (with Maurice Chevalier). Ginger Rogers was simply another tap dancer in Busby Berkeley's chorus line. Nelson Eddy and Fred Astaire wouldn't arrive in Hollywood for another year. Four-year-old Shirley Temple was appearing on the nation's standard (eighteen feet high, twenty-four feet wide) screens in a series of one-reel shorts called *Baby Burlesks*. Benny Goodman was rooming with Tommy Dorsey, working in New York pit bands and playing clarinet cadenzas on radio for the Hoffman Ginger Ale Hour. In Beaumont, Texas, sixteen-year-old Harry Haag James approached a traveling band leader named Lawrence Welk and asked, "You don't happen to be looking for a trumpet player, do you?" The leader asked for a demonstration, James blasted away, and Welk shook his head. He said, "You play too loud for my band, son."

In retrospect, America seems to have been singularly blind to the future. When Professor Auguste Piccard penetrated the stratosphere in a balloon and wrote in his log, "We have attained an altitude of 54,120 ft. All human records broken!" there was no way of knowing that time would make the entry seem quaint. People were impressed by Dr. William Beebe's bathysphere and its brief dive to 2,200 feet off Bermuda; they wouldn't have

believed that aquanauts a generation later would live at that depth for a month. It was in the naval maneuvers of 1932 that an American aircraft carrier, slipping past picket destroyers northeast of Oahu, attacked Pearl Harbor in a dawn "raid" and "sank" the warships anchored there. Nobody noticed the watchful Japanese in Honolulu, or knew that Tokyo was filing a long memorandum on the paper victory.

Most striking of all, newspaper readers were unaware that at Cambridge University Sir James Chadwick had discovered the neutron, the key to atomic fission. Its significance was unappreciated. According to physics doctrine at the time, only projectiles with fantastic penetrating power could split the nucleus of an atom. The very notion of such a split was highly theoretical, and certainly it couldn't be achieved by the neutron, which carried no electrical charge whatever. Lord Rutherford told a meeting that people who foresaw large-scale release of atomic energy were "talking moonshine." Albert Einstein, then en route to asylum at Cal Tech, agreed that the idea was "fantastic." The only practical use for uranium worth mentioning was to paint luminous figures on clock dials. Here it served as a substitute for radium, abandoned in the spring of 1932 when the owners of a New Jersey clock factory discovered that their dial painters were dying. Imbibed radium, they were shocked to learn, accumulated in the bones and led to certain death. The clockmakers turned in relief to uranium. It was so safe, so benign; no one could possibly associate it with death or even illness.