

# Focus Lesson 3

Why was Michigan hurt so much by the hard times of the 1930s?

## VOCABULARY

stock market  
Great Depression  
unemployed  
union  
strike  
closed shop

## VOCABULARY STRATEGY

**Word Origins** A union is a group of workers with a common goal. The word **union** comes from a Latin word meaning "one."

## READING STRATEGY

**Cause and Effect** Use the chart below to show the causes and effects of the 1937 events in auto factories.

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## MICHIGAN GLCE

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# World War I and Hard Times

In 1932 Michigan workers were hit by hard economic times. Yip Harburg wrote a song. It was called "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" It described how many people felt:

*"They used to tell me I was building a dream,  
with peace and glory ahead,  
Why should I be standing in line, just waiting  
for bread?  
Once I built a railroad, I made it run, made it  
race against time.  
Once I built a railroad; now it's done. Brother,  
can you spare a dime?"*

## A World at War

In 1914 a huge war began in Europe. Great Britain, France, and Russia were at war with Germany, Turkey, and Austria-Hungary. So many countries fought that the war was later called World War I.

At first many Americans didn't want to get into the war. Then, in 1915, a German submarine sank the British ship *Lusitania*. It killed 123 Americans. On April 6, 1917, Congress declared war on Germany.

During the war some Americans feared that German immigrants were spies for Germany. Speaking German was against the law in some places. Berlin, Michigan, had the same name as Germany's capital. They changed the name to Marne. People even started calling frankfurters, named for a German city, "hot dogs" instead.



1910

1920

1930

1940

1914

World War I begins

1918

World War I ends

1929

Stock market crashes

1935

Walter Reuther brings the United Auto Workers to GM

1936-1937

GM workers strike in Flint

## Michigan Gets Involved

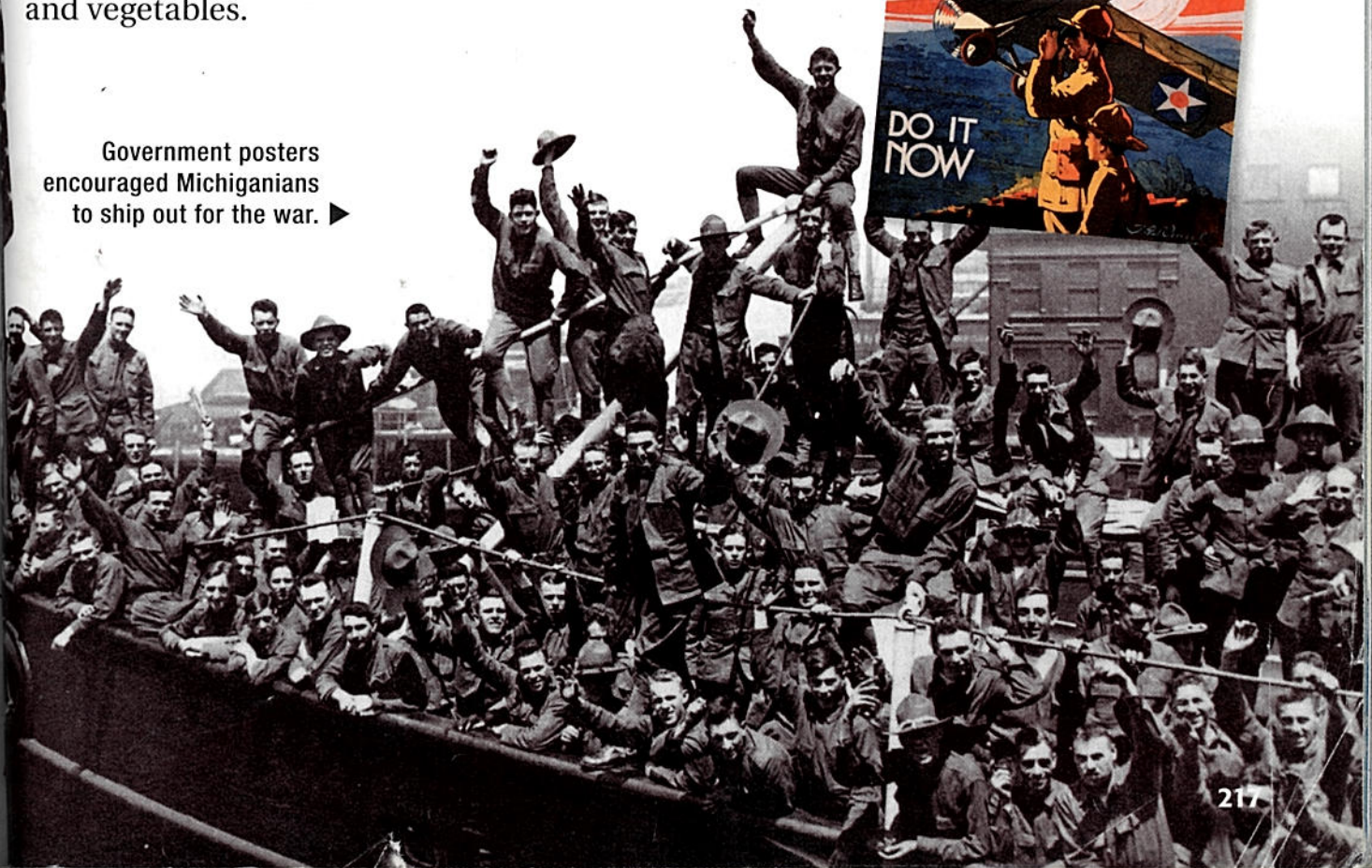
Almost 175,000 Michiganians were sent to fight in World War I. About 5,000 of them died. Soldiers had not seen this kind of war before. For the first time, tanks and machine guns were used. Fighter planes and poison gas were used, too.

At home, Michigan factories made thousands of trucks and tanks. They also made ambulances and airplane engines. Children got days off from school to work on state farms. They helped to harvest extra fruits and vegetables.

World War I ended on November 11, 1918. The United States and its allies won. Americans hoped it was the last war ever. They called it “the war to end all wars.”

**QUICK CHECK** Why did the United States fight in World War I? *Cause and Effect*

Government posters encouraged Michiganians to ship out for the war. ▶







▲ During the Depression, unemployed men lined up for free meals at soup kitchens.

## B From Good Times to Bad

The end of World War I brought good times for many people. The economy was strong in the 1920s. Michigan families could afford new things like radios and electric refrigerators.

People also began spending more. They put money into the **stock market**. The stock market is where shares of companies, or stocks, are bought and sold. People thought buying stocks was a quick way to get rich. They borrowed money to buy as much as they could. Then the prices of stocks began to drop in 1929. People began to sell them.

As stocks lost their value, people began to panic. Finally, on October 29, 1929, stock prices “crashed.” Everybody wanted to sell. Almost nobody wanted to buy. Americans lost billions of dollars. The good times were over.

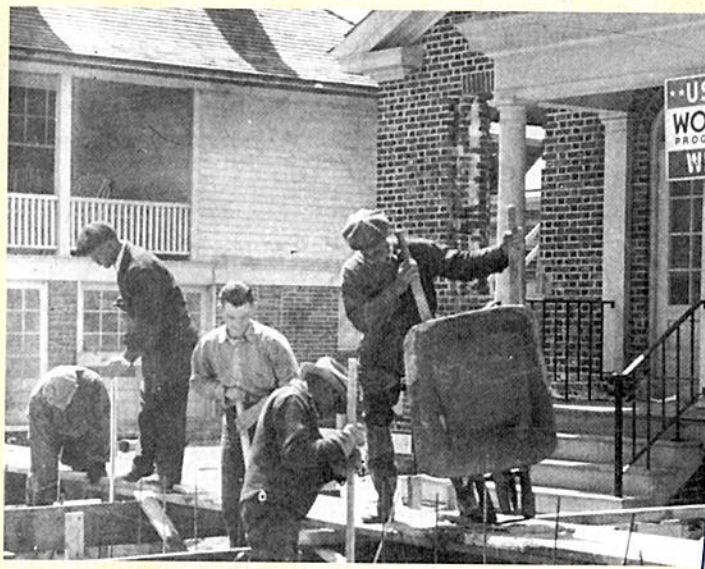
## Michigan Is Hit Hard

The **Great Depression** was the worst economic time in American history. It was a hard time for other countries as well. Factories closed. Banks that had loaned money to businesses failed. Families lost their savings. Many farmers lost their land.

The Depression hit Michigan harder than most states. Most Americans did not have much money. They could no longer afford expensive goods like new cars.

Many factory workers lost their jobs. By 1930 one in five Michigan workers was **unemployed**. This meant that they did not have jobs. In Detroit almost half of all adults did not have jobs. Because of discrimination, more African Americans lost their jobs than white workers.





▲ Unemployed men found jobs with the Works Progress Administration.



## A "New Deal"

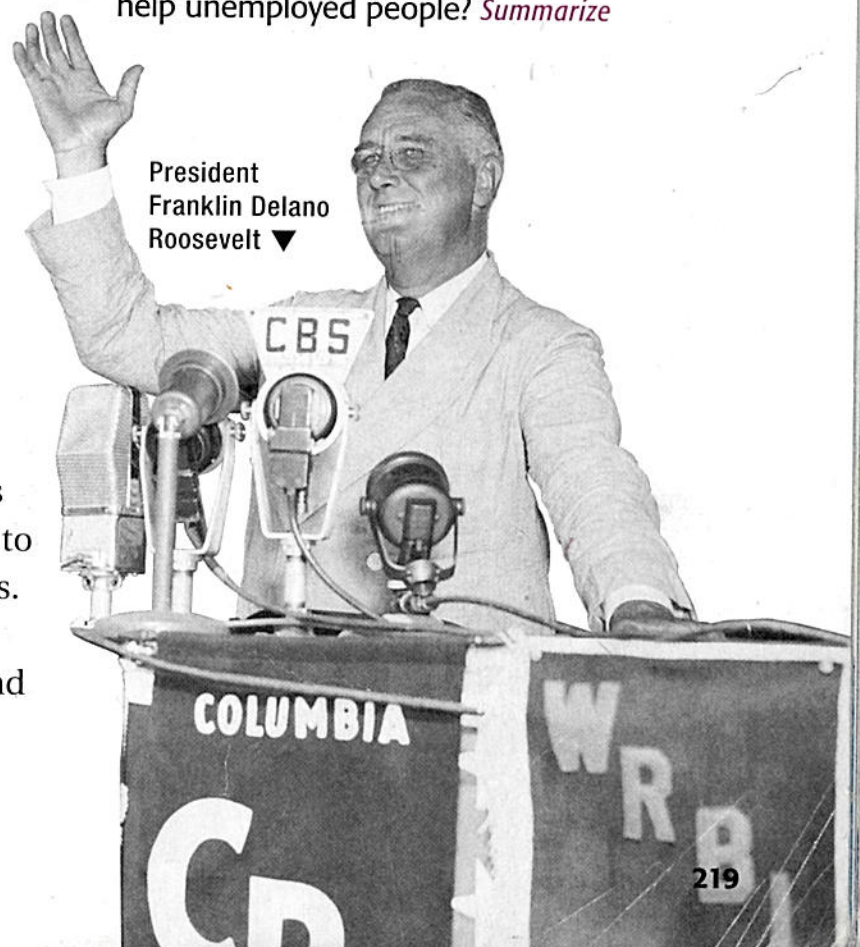
In 1930 Frank Murphy became the mayor of Detroit. Murphy was like Hazen Pingree from years before. Murphy helped people find jobs and grow food. Still, life was hard for many families. They sewed clothes from burlap sacks. They made furniture from old crates.

In 1933 Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President. He was from New York. He told Americans, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." He promised a "new deal." It would get people working.

Roosevelt's New Deal programs made many jobs. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired workers to build roads, bridges, and playgrounds. The WPA also hired artists, writers, and musicians. They made murals and other works. You can still see them around Michigan.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) paid workers to build roads. Workers also planted more than 200 million trees. Even with these jobs, the Great Depression lasted for 10 years.

 **QUICK CHECK** How did Roosevelt help unemployed people? *Summarize*





## 📍 Workers Unite

A **union** is a group of workers who join together to get better pay and working conditions. There had been some unions in Michigan. Most factory workers did not belong to them. Factory workers were often better paid than other workers. Also, there were often more factory jobs than workers to fill them.

The Great Depression changed that. Many factory workers lost their jobs. Those who kept their jobs were paid less. They also worked longer days. If they complained, bosses told them that many men would be happy to take their place.

This union rally brought 150,000 people to downtown Detroit. ▼

## The United Auto Workers

Walter Reuther was a young Detroit autoworker. Reuther was the son of a union leader from West Virginia. He said, “There is no greater contribution than to help the weak.”

In 1935 he wanted to start a union at General Motors (GM). GM was the world’s largest automaker. Reuther and others talked to thousands of workers. They got the men to join the United Auto Workers (UAW).

By 1936 the UAW was ready to make demands. It wanted GM to change the way it treated its workers.

 **QUICK CHECK** Why did autoworkers want to join unions in the 1930s? *Summarize*





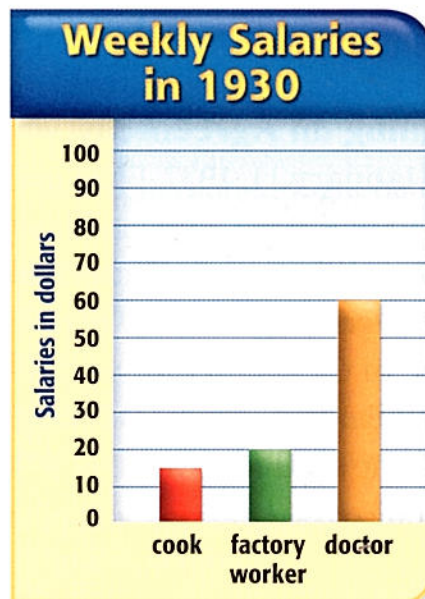
# DATAGRAPHIC

## Prices Then and Now

The chart below lists prices of some things in 1930 and today. It seems as though things were pretty cheap back then, but weekly salaries were much lower, too.

Prices Then and Now		
Item	1930	Today
hamburger	.15	\$3.50
hot dog	.10	\$2.50
boy's shirt	\$1.00	\$10.00
loaf of bread	.10	\$2.50
quart of milk	.10	\$1.25
refrigerator	\$99.50	\$800.00
electric stove	\$124.50	\$1,000.00
new car	\$700.00	\$20,000.00

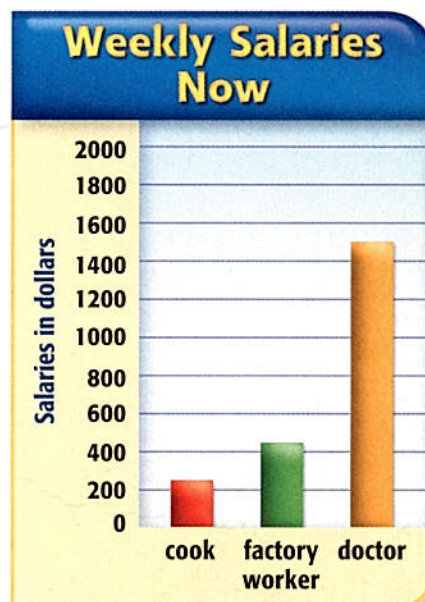
Source: [www.michigan.gov/hal](http://www.michigan.gov/hal)



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### Think About Salaries and Prices

1. How much did a boy's shirt cost in 1930 compared to today?
2. Which job shown on the graph paid the most in 1930?
3. How many weeks did a factory worker have to work to pay for a new car in 1930? How many weeks would it take the factory worker at today's prices and salary?



Source: [www.michigan.gov/hal](http://www.michigan.gov/hal)



## ① The Sit-Down Strike

On December 30, 1936, UAW workers at a GM factory in Flint, Michigan, went on **strike**. They stopped working. They wanted better working conditions. The Flint strike was a “sit-down” strike. This meant the workers came to work but would not do their jobs until GM agreed to their demands. The workers stayed inside the factory. The company could not bring in other workers to do their jobs.

### Reaching an Agreement

On January 11, 1937, Flint police tried to make the workers leave. The workers threw water. They threw bolts. The police backed away. Strikers stayed in the factory for 44 days and nights. Family members brought them food. The food was made at a “strike kitchen” close by.

Finally GM agreed to meet with the union’s leaders. Frank Murphy was now Michigan’s governor. He helped the two sides reach an agreement on February 11. Each side gave up some of its demands. The UAW got better pay and working conditions. GM also agreed that the union could speak for the company’s workers.

Chrysler, another automaker, also agreed to let the UAW represent its workers. Henry Ford would not let the UAW come to his factories. In a book Ford wrote, “The strike . . . only makes the situation worse whether you win or lose.”

Ford fought the UAW in court for years. He fired workers who tried to sign up union members. Finally, in May 1941, Ford agreed to let the UAW represent his workers. Now all automakers were a **closed shop**. This means all workers had to join a union.



◀ Workers in a GM plant during the Flint sit-down strike; (below) a union pin





## The Spread of Unions

Other workers soon followed the ideas of the UAW. Young women working in a Woolworth's department store in Detroit went on strike. After an eight-day sit-down strike they got a raise of five cents per hour. After the Depression, more workers joined unions. By 1950 the UAW had more than 1 million members.



▲ Workers' children supported the strikers.

The unions asked Congress to protect workers. New laws said workers could not be asked to work more than 40 hours a week. They could not be paid less than a "minimum wage." The wage would be set by the government.

**QUICK CHECK** Why do you think Chrysler allowed the UAW to represent its workers? *Draw Conclusions*

## What You Learned

- A** Michigan factories made vehicles for the army in World War I.
- B** The Great Depression brought hard times to many Michigan families. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal gave jobs to many unemployed workers.
- C** During the Depression, unions fought for better conditions for autoworkers.
- D** A strike in Flint encouraged other workers to join unions.

## Focus Lesson Review

1. **Focus Question** Why was Michigan hurt so much by the hard times of the 1930s?
2. **Vocabulary** Write one sentence for each vocabulary term.  
**closed shop**      **unemployed**  
**strike**              **union**
3. **Economics** Why did the stock market "crash" of 1929 hurt so many Americans?
4. **Critical Thinking Cause and Effect** Why were African Americans particularly hard hit during the Great Depression?

5. **Reading Strategy Cause and Effect**

Use the chart to show how President Roosevelt's New Deal affected Michigan.

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6. **Write About THE BIG IDEA** How did new technology change the way nations fought in World War I?
7. **Link to Art** In the 1930s, unions used posters to recruit workers. Sketch a poster you would use to convince workers to join a union.