

# BEANS, BACON, AND GRAVY

## A POPULAR SONG

### 1930s

----- *Anonymous* -----

Popular songs often capture the emotions of a particular time, as is evident in this Depression-era song by an anonymous songwriter. While there had been other economic depressions or panics in the United States, the crisis of the 1930s touched almost every American— “the worst I’ve seen is nineteen thirty-one” says this songwriter—and left a lifelong impression on most. Those lucky enough to find work faced other frustrations: as this writer implies, having a job and having something to eat did not necessarily bring happiness and satisfaction.

#### **THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Summarizing**

How does the author of this song feel about his present situation and his future?  
How would you characterize his attitude?

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I was born long ago  
In eighteen ninety-one,  
And I’ve seen many a panic, I will own.  
I’ve been hungry, I’ve been cold,  
And now I’m growing old,  
But the worst I’ve seen is nineteen thirty-one.

#### *Chorus:*

Oh, those beans, bacon, and gravy,  
They almost drive me crazy!  
I eat them till I see them in my dreams.  
When I wake up in the morning  
And another day is dawning,  
Then I know I’ll have another mess of beans.

We all congregate each morning  
At the county barn at dawning,  
And everyone is happy, so it seems.  
But when our work is done  
We file in one by one  
And thank the Lord for one more mess of beans.

We have Hooverized on butter,  
And for milk we've only water,  
And I haven't seen a steak in many a day.  
As for pies, cakes, and jellies,  
We substitute sow-bellies  
For which we work the county road each day.

If there ever comes a time  
When I have more than a dime,  
They will have to put me under lock and key,  
For they've had me broke so long  
I can only sing this song  
Of the workers and their misery.

Source: *Songs of Work and Freedom*, edited by Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer  
(New York, 1960).

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER**

Students may answer that the attitude of this song's author is both angry and resigned. Students may argue that he sees his present as bleak, the worst of a lifetime of hard times as a worker. They may cite as an example the opening verse, in which he sings about how he's been hungry and cold but that 1931 is the worst time he's ever known. Students may also observe that he doubts he will have a better future, since he writes about "if" things get better rather than when they will get better. Students may also cite the last verse, in which the songwriter says that if he ever has more money "they will have to put me under lock and key," which perhaps suggests that he has lost all hope of a better life and would be shocked into insanity by the arrival of good fortune.