



## 1932

### The Ford Hunger March

The Ford Hunger March, also known as the Battle at River Rouge took place on March 7 at the Ford Motor Company River Rouge Plant. 75 percent of the workforce at this plant had been laid off and without public relief people were dying of cold and hunger. Ford Motor Company refused to assist its laid off workforce. Ford's Service Department labeled public relief and union organizations as communists. The Service Department used hired thugs and ex-cons to intimidate employees who attempted to organize the workforce. On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 3,000 peaceful demonstrators were met with gunfire from Ford's Service Department and local police. The March resulted in the deaths of 4 demonstrators; one being an African American who died from gunshot wounds.

<sup>1</sup> Beginning of the March

Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, 63783\_5\_vmc

<sup>2</sup> Hunger March to Pontiac, Michigan

Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, 77561\_vmc

<sup>3</sup> Funeral for Marchers

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# 1932 Ford Hunger March

## Credits:

Sugar, Maurice and Ann Fagan Ginger. *The Ford Hunger March*. Berkeley: Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, 1980. Print.

## Keywords/Topics:

Race Relations, Politics and Legal Issues

## Questions:

1. Why were people angry?
2. Why did the police fight against the protesters instead of protect them from gunfire?
3. Why didn't Ford offer relief to the unemployed?
4. What was the role of the Service Department?

## Links to Internet Websites

<http://www.bitsofnews.com/content/view/7336/>

[http://www.workers.org/2009/us/ford\\_hunger\\_march\\_0402/](http://www.workers.org/2009/us/ford_hunger_march_0402/)

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/labormatters/default.html>

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Protesters gathered at the Dearborn city limits, one mile from the River Rouge Plant. When the marchers reached the outskirts of the plant, Ford's Service Department and Dearborn Police opened fire. Fights broke out between members of the Service Department and protesters, leaving hundreds injured and four dead. The Hunger March was a major stepping-stone in the labor movement and gave unionists momentum to organize.

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Henry Ford's wealth, influence, and loyalty to the city of Dearborn insured that he was able to use the Dearborn Police Department however he wished. The Dearborn Police had a reputation of working with the Service Department and doing Ford's dirty work. During the Hunger March the police officers stood side-by-side with the Service Department and attacked peaceful protesters.

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A total of five men lost their lives as a result of the march. A special funeral was arranged for the martyred marchers. It is estimated that more than 60,000 people attended the funeral. The four men who died at the scene were interred side-by-side. Curtis Williams, an African American worker died of wound complications that June. Racism and segregation kept him from being buried with the other deceased protesters. Williams was cremated and according to some accounts, his ashes were scattered over the cemetery.

Thousands of mourners walked to Woodmere Cemetery to bury the victims of the Hunger March.