

Prohibition

Americans were drinking too much. Families were being destroyed, men were losing jobs, slums were growing.

Religious groups and others came together to ban Demon Rum – alcohol.

They were successful and the 18th amendment prohibiting the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcohol was added to the Constitution in 1918.

The National Prohibition Act, known informally as the Volstead Act, was enacted to carry out the intent of the 18th Amendment

Bars were closed while the authorities smashed bottles, barrels, and kegs.

Those who wanted a safer and more sanctified country were pleased. The thought was that productivity would increase, families would grow closer and the urban slums would disappear.

This ushered in an era known as prohibition.

Prohibition did initiate some positive behaviors.

It was believed by social scientists that the consumption of alcohol decreased throughout the decade.

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As the health records of the time showed alcoholism and alcohol-related diseases such as cirrhosis were decreased.

Personal savings accounts increased during the decade as well but it is difficult to determine whether this had anything to do with prohibition because the American economy during the 1920's was booming.

Although prohibition seemed to have some positives, it seemed the disadvantages outweighed the plusses.

The government did not have enough money to enforce the Volstead Act. The Volstead Act had loopholes that people used to encourage alcohol abuse.

These loopholes allowed for the use of alcohol for medical purposes, religious rites, as well as small production for home use.

The production of near beer, or beer without alcohol was permitted. But first had to be brewed with the alcohol. Some breweries would say their product was scheduled to have the alcohol removed – although time and again beer with alcohol somehow made its way to a thirsty public.

Illegal drinking establishments called speakeasies were popping up everywhere. Many Americans enjoyed flouting the law and drinking illegally.

Not only were Americans drinking illegally but the alcohol was not being regulated and the strength of the drinks increased.

People were drinking a lot and drinker faster to avoid the police.

Many of the people producing the alcohol were just out for money and would distill anything possible.

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Some of this alcohol produced was said to cause nerve damage, blindness, and even death.

Young women of the 20's consumed alcohol fervently. This new generation of women were empowered by their new-found freedoms.

They could now vote, work, drive cars – and drink illicitly.

One organization that profited the most from prohibition was organized crime.

Crime bosses such as Al Capone of Chicago used intimidation and even murder to get their product on the street and sold to buyers.

Mobsters fought over their turfs and were soon forcing legitimate businesses to buy their protection.

Many police forces were corrupt; they took bribes of cash and booze to look the other way as gangsters distributed alcohol.

The illegal production and distribution of alcohol was called bootlegging.

The 18th amendment was a social experiment. Many contend that it was the only amendment which restricted peoples' individual rights.

In the end, Prohibition was too expensive to regulate.

When the country went into an economic Depression at the end of the '20s and early '30s, the federal government could no longer afford enforce prohibition.

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The 18th amendment was repealed by the 21st amendment, ending prohibition once and for all.

For all its promise, prohibition was ultimately a failure and lasted fourteen years.
