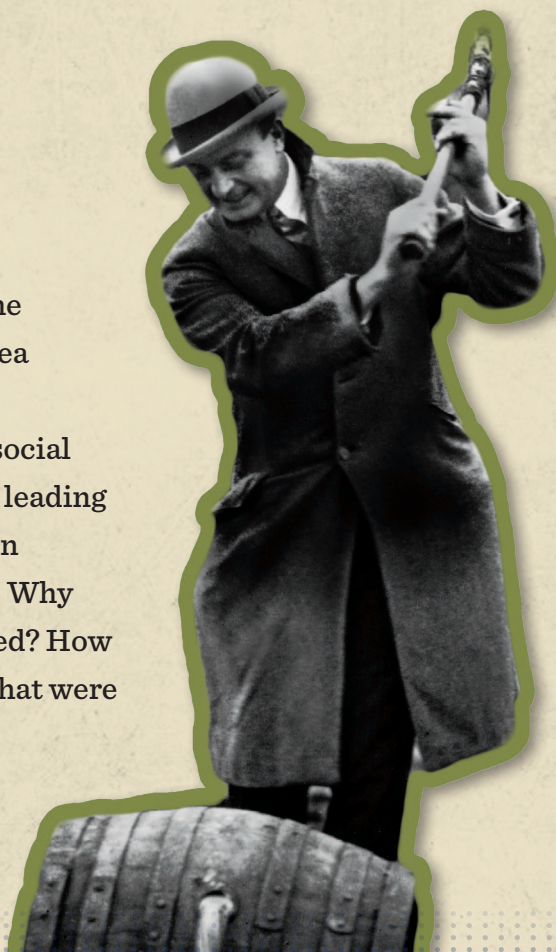




# THE RISE and FALL OF PROHIBITION

## OVERVIEW

Beginning in 1920, the 18th Amendment prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transport of alcohol, but the idea of temperance in drinking began more than a century earlier. Eventually, religious groups, politicians, and social organizations advocated for total abolition of alcohol, leading to Prohibition. The 18th Amendment caused a surge in organized crime and was eventually repealed in 1933. Why did some groups want a Prohibition amendment passed? How did Prohibition fit into the progressive movement? What were its effects, and why was it eventually repealed?



### *related activities*

#### PROHIBITION PICTIONARY

Use your skills to get classmates to identify and define which Prohibition Era term you draw.

#### PROHIBITION ERA DINNER PARTY

Learn about the roles of historical figures during the Prohibition Era by taking on their identities for a dinner party.

#### SMART BOARD ACTIVITY

Learn about Prohibition through informational slides and activities using the SMART platform.

#### WHO SAID IT? QUOTE SORTING

Learn about the differences between the Founders' and Progressives' beliefs about government by sorting quotes from each group.



# TEACHER NOTES

## LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Distinguish between temperance and Prohibition.
- Understand the process for amending the Constitution.
- Compare and contrast the Founders' views on government with those of Progressives.
- Understand historical events leading up to and following the passage of the Eighteenth and 21st Amendments.
- Understand and evaluate arguments offered by those in support of a constitutional amendment banning the sale of alcohol.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- Read the Eighteenth and 21st Amendments to the Constitution.
- Define the terms Prohibition, Temperance, Progressive, Organized Crime, and Repeal on your own. Compare your definitions with a partner.

### PLEASE NOTE

This resource contains background essays at three levels:

10-12<sup>th</sup> grade (1100 words)

8-9<sup>th</sup> grade (800 words)

6-7<sup>th</sup> grade (500 words)

## EXTENSION

The 18th Amendment banned the manufacture, sale, and transport of a substance. Make a list of all the government officials or agencies who can approve or ban substances citizens ingest. In practice today, do nationwide bans on substances require a constitutional amendment? *Should* they require one? Discuss the following questions:

- a. How do these types of prohibitions compare to prohibition of alcohol?
- b. What effect have these bans had on individual freedom?
- c. Do similar types of crime and violence accompany nationwide prohibitions on illegal drugs? Why?
- d. Are these worthwhile trade-offs? Explain.



1,100  
words

# THE RISE and FALL OF PROHIBITION

The legal ban on the manufacture, sale, and transport of alcohol, within the United States, otherwise known as Prohibition, began with the ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1919. The ban technically went into effect in 1920. The roots of Prohibition can be traced to the early 19th century temperance movement, which was eventually fueled by the rising influence of Social Gospel Protestantism and the wider progressive movement. What began as an effort to persuade individuals to choose to abstain from alcohol, shifted to an effort to use the force of law to ban its sale and transport. Though perhaps noble in aim, the legal enforcement of the ban limited personal freedom, gave rise to widespread lawlessness, and encouraged the growth of organized crime.

## RELIGION AND TEMPERANCE

In the early 19th century, Protestants including Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians took part in revivals to convert new followers to Christ to overcome corruption in the world. In their eyes, drinking was part of that corruption. They became advocates for temperance, which is defined as personal self-restraint or abstinence from alcohol. At this time, temperance advocates were not calling for legal prohibition of alcohol, but rather asking citizens to choose to abstain from its use.

## THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

Temperance organizations started to realize that, for temperance to become mainstream, the moral argument against using liquor would not be enough. They began to employ what they claimed was a "scientific," fact-based approach. As the Progressive Era began around the turn of the twentieth century, the advocates of temperance supported their religious arguments with various scientific reasons. Studies found that alcohol limited motor reaction, caused issues with nerve centers controlling the heart, interfered with digestion, and worsened diseases. Organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), under the leadership of Frances Willard, used the new scientific findings to their benefit. They advocated compulsory instruction about temperance in public schools and wrote textbooks on the subject.

## THE ANTI-SALOON LEAGUE

Many Protestant churches joined forces with the Anti-Saloon League (ASL). The ASL began as a state organization in Ohio in 1893, and in 1895, Anti-Saloon Leagues across the country came together to form the nation's leading lobbying group for anti-alcohol legislation. At their inception, they advocated not only for temperance, but for laws suppressing the



Saloon owners were targeted by Temperance and Prohibition advocates.

Photo Courtesy Library of Congress

rights of saloon owners to do business. By the early 1900s, the ASL was becoming a major political force. Their head lobbyist described their efforts: “Word went out from Washington and state headquarters to send letters, telegrams, and petitions to Congressmen and Senators in Washington. They rolled in by tens of thousands, burying Congress like an avalanche”. The ASL’s state-by-state approach was working: by 1917, 26 of the 48 states had passed prohibition measures. Congress was also considering a constitutional amendment for nationwide prohibition of alcohol.

The 18th Amendment, prohibiting the “manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating beverages,” was approved by Congress in December of 1917 and went into effect in 1920 after the required number of states ratified it. The amendment was the first ever to limit citizens’ personal liberties.

## PROHIBITION AND THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

Prohibition succeeded in large part when the ASL was able to apply political pressure to intimidate politicians. The ideas used to justify a nation-wide legal ban on the sale, manufacture, and transport of alcohol can be understood in the context of progressivism. Progressivism was a significant shift away from the traditional American understanding of the purpose of government to that point. The founders believed citizens could best pursue happiness if government was limited to protecting the life, liberty, and property of individuals. They believed people were naturally flawed, and structured government so that people’s inherent self-interest would lead officials to check one another’s attempts to exercise more power than the Constitution allows. Unlike the framers of the Constitution, Progressives believed that man’s nature can and should be bettered by enlightened rulers. Therefore, they believed, government should provide citizens with the environment and the means to improve themselves through government-sponsored programs and policies as well as economic redistribution.

The Progressive movement successfully enacted a host of constitutional changes which increased the power of the national government. The 18th Amendment banned the manufacture, sale, or transport of intoxicating beverages and the Volstead Act codified it in U.S. law. The Sixteenth Amendment authorized the national government to tax incomes for the first time ever. The Seventeenth Amendment provided for the direct election of U.S. Senators, diminishing the power of the states to influence national laws in Congress. The 19th Amendment barred states from denying female citizens the right to vote in federal elections.

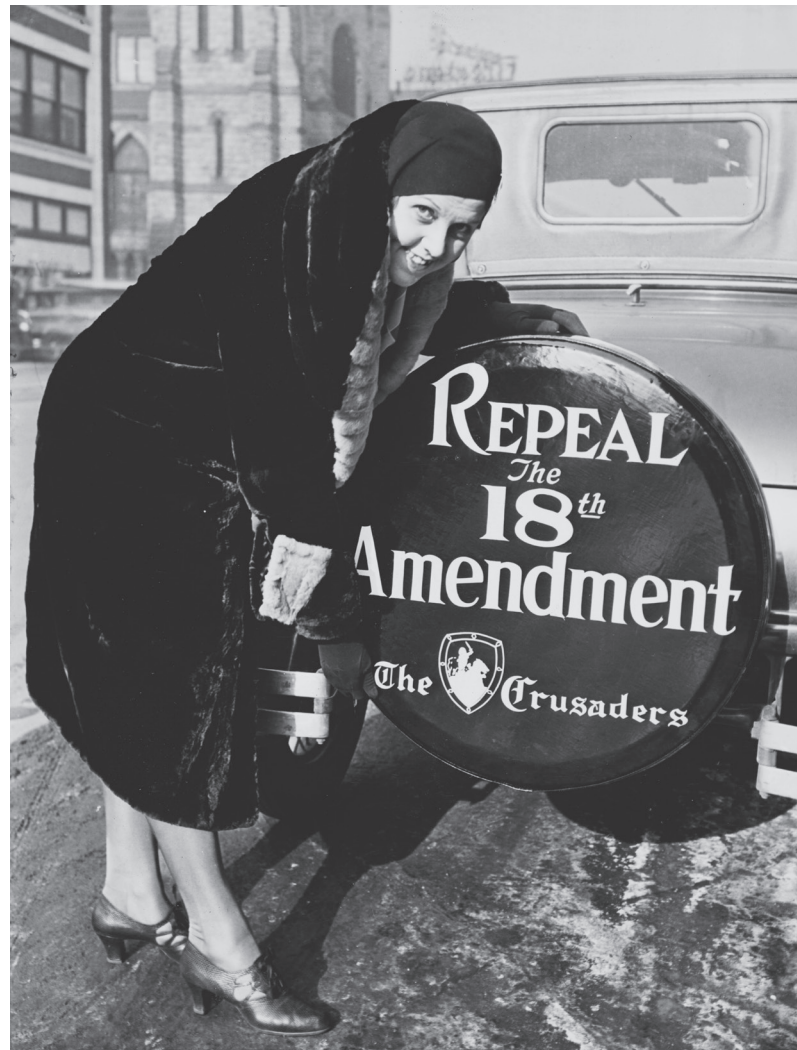
## TOWARDS REPEAL

The 18th Amendment did not ban the consumption of alcohol, only its manufacture, sale, and transport. Many began hoarding alcoholic beverages during the year between ratification and the time that Prohibition went into effect. Under the law, individuals were still allowed to make wine and alcoholic cider for home use, but moonshine could be deadly if made incorrectly. Smugglers brought liquor into the United States at port cities around the country.

Federal agents charged with enforcing the law were ill-equipped to deal with the large numbers of bootleggers and speakeasies, and courts were overloaded with Prohibition-related cases. Chicago and New York were hubs for crime bosses like Al Capone and Meyer Lansky. Gangs began fighting for power in their territories which led to corruption, destruction, and death.

The Great Depression struck a major blow to the nation's economy, and the tide had begun to turn against Prohibition. Some lawmakers believed that a tax on alcohol could help increase federal revenue to aid the struggling country. Citizens were concerned about the upsurge in crime and violence. Franklin Roosevelt reversed his position and came out against Prohibition during the 1932 presidential campaign. Two groups led the effort for repeal: the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment and the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform. In 1933, Congress passed and President Franklin Roosevelt signed an amendment to the Volstead Act, legalizing the sale of light beers and wine below a new, higher limit for "intoxicating" beverages. Congress approved the 21st Amendment on February 20, 1933, and it was ratified by state conventions throughout the year.

On December 5, 1933, the United States ratified the 21st Amendment, repealing the 18th Amendment. This was the first time in American history a constitutional amendment had been repealed. The 21st Amendment affirmed the power of states to make laws concerning the sale and transport of alcohol. Many states began tightly controlling liquor usage through licensing requirements, drinking age limits, and specific hours of operation for liquor sellers. Many of these regulations are still in force today.



▲ After 13 years, the 21st Amendment repealed Prohibition.

Photo Courtesy Library of Congress

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What is the historical relationship between the Temperance Movement and Prohibition?  

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2. How did the Founders' view of government differ from the Progressives' view in terms of:
  - the nature of mankind  

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  - the purpose of government  

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  - the types of powers government should be given  

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  - the types of things it is possible for government to do  

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3. Why did Prohibition lead to crime and violence? What is the relationship between Prohibition and individual rights, including property rights?  

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4. How did the 18th Amendment differ from every other constitutional amendment in history?  

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5. The constitutional amendment process requires that 3/4ths of the states ratify any changes. This ensures that most of the country must be in favor of a change in order to modify the Constitution. Why do you think that Prohibition, which had been approved by the people, failed so dramatically?  

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# THE RISE and FALL OF PROHIBITION

**P**rohibition was a ban on the manufacture, sale, and transport of alcohol within the United States. It began with the ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1919. The roots of Prohibition go back to the Temperance Movement. Temperance was the effort to persuade individuals not to drink alcohol. Prohibition legally banned its sale and transport for everyone.

## TOWARDS PROHIBITION

In the early 19th century, Protestants took part in revivals to convert new followers to Christ. In their eyes, drinking was a worldly evil that needed to be overcome. They became promoters of temperance. This meant they worked to convince people to choose not to drink. They wrote articles and gave speeches, letting people know that alcohol caused many serious health problems. Organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) called for schoolchildren to be taught about temperance and wrote textbooks on the subject.

Many Protestant churches joined forces with the Anti-Saloon League. The Anti-Saloon League was the nation's leading lobbying group for anti-alcohol legislation. They promoted temperance, but also called for laws suppressing the rights of

saloon owners. By the early 1900s, the League was gaining influence. By 1917, 26 of the 48 states had passed prohibition measures. Congress was also considering a constitutional amendment for nationwide prohibition of alcohol.

The 18th Amendment was approved by Congress in December of 1917. It prohibited the "manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating beverages." The amendment went into effect in 1920, one year after the required number of states ratified it. The 18th Amendment was the first ever to limit citizens' personal liberties.

## PROHIBITION AND THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

Prohibition was connected to the wider Progressive movement. Advocates for it believed that alcohol was holding back the progress of mankind. Therefore, they believed, the government had to intervene. This belief was consistent with an important shift away from the traditional American understanding of the purpose of government. The founders believed that limiting government power was the best way to ensure citizens could best pursue happiness. They believed people were naturally flawed, and government should

be structured with checks and balances. Unlike the framers of the Constitution, Progressives believed that people's natures could be made better through government action. Therefore, government should provide citizens with ways to improve themselves through programs and policies. The Sixteenth through 19th Amendments are sometimes called the "Progressive Era Amendments."

## TOWARDS REPEAL

The 18th Amendment did not ban the consumption of alcohol, only its manufacture, sale, and transport. The Volstead Act codified it into U.S. law. Many began hoarding alcoholic beverages while they could. Individuals could legally make wine and alcoholic cider for home use, but moonshine could be deadly if made incorrectly. Smugglers brought liquor into the United States at port cities around the country.

Federal agents charged with enforcing the law were not prepared to deal with the large numbers of bootleggers and speakeasies. Courts were overloaded with Prohibition-related cases. Chicago and New York were hubs for crime bosses who attempted to transport alcohol across the country. Gangs began fighting for power in their territories. The results were corruption, destruction, and death.

The Great Depression struck a major blow to the nation's economy, and the tide began to turn against Prohibition. Lawmakers believed that a tax on alcohol could help increase federal revenue to aid the struggling country. Citizens were concerned about the upsurge in crime and violence. Franklin



After 13 years, the 21st Amendment repealed Prohibition.

Photo Courtesy Library of Congress

Roosevelt reversed his position and came out against Prohibition during his 1932 presidential campaign. In 1933, Congress passed and President Franklin Roosevelt signed a law legalizing the sale of light beers and wine below a new, higher limit for "intoxicating" beverages. Congress approved the 21st Amendment on February 20, 1933, and it was ratified by state conventions throughout the year.



On December 5, 1933, the United States ratified the 21st Amendment, repealing the 18th Amendment. This was the first time in American history a constitutional amendment had been repealed. Many

states began tightly controlling liquor usage through licensing requirements, drinking age limits, and specific hours of operation for liquor sellers. Many of these regulations are still in force today.

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

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- the nature of mankind

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- the purpose of government

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- the types of powers government should be given

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- the types of things it is possible for government to do

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3. Why did Prohibition lead to crime and violence? What were other effects of Prohibition?

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4. How did the 18th Amendment differ from every other constitutional amendment in history?

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5. Why do you believe the people changed their minds about Prohibition?

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## TOWARDS PROHIBITION

In the early 19th century, Protestants took part in revivals. They became promoters of temperance. Temperance organizations wanted to convince people to choose not to drink. They wrote articles and gave speeches, letting people know that alcohol caused serious health problems. They called for schoolchildren to be taught about temperance.

Many Protestant churches joined forces with the Anti-Saloon League. The Anti-Saloon League was the nation's leading lobbying group for anti-alcohol laws. They promoted temperance, but also called for laws suppressing the rights of saloon owners. By the early 1900s, the League was gaining influence. By 1917, 26 of the 48 states had passed prohibition measures.

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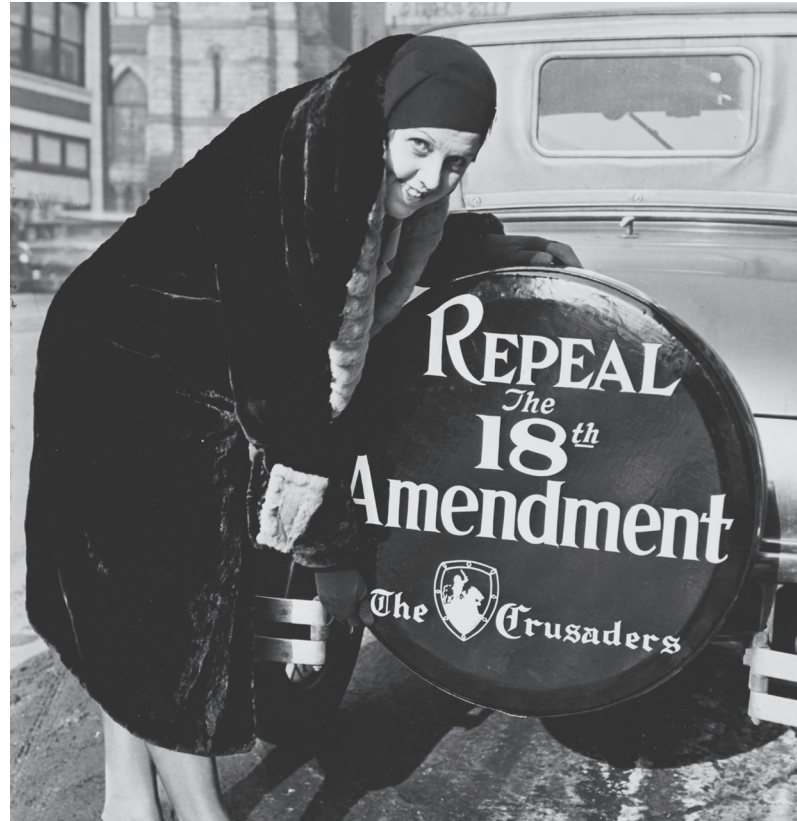
Prohibition was connected to the wider Progressive movement. Advocates for it believed that alcohol was holding back the progress of mankind. Therefore, they believed, the government had to take action. This belief was a big shift away from the way Americans had understood the purpose of government. The founders believed in limiting government power. They believed people were naturally flawed. So they built the government with checks and balances. They believed this was the best way to ensure citizens could pursue happiness. In contrast, Progressives believed that people's natures could be made better by wise leaders. Therefore, they believed, government should give citizens ways to improve themselves.

## TOWARDS REPEAL

The 18th Amendment led to a rise in crime. Smugglers brought liquor into the United States at port cities around the country. Speakeasies served alcohol illegally. Federal agents charged with enforcing the law were not prepared to deal with the large numbers of Prohibition-related cases. Chicago and New York were centers of crime. Gangs fought for power in their territories. Very often, police did not enforce the law. Many people were killed.

The tide had begun to turn against Prohibition. Some lawmakers believed that a tax on alcohol could help the country through the Great Depression. Franklin Roosevelt came out against Prohibition when he ran for president in 1932. The next year Congress legalized the sale of light beers and wine below a new, higher limit for “intoxicating” beverages. Congress approved the 21st Amendment on February 20, 1933. It was ratified by states throughout the year.

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Photo Courtesy Library of Congress

controlling liquor usage through licensing requirements, drinking age limits, and specific hours of operation for liquor sellers. Many of these rules are still in force today.

### CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What is temperance? What is Prohibition? Compare and contrast the two concepts.
2. What was the Founders' view of the purpose of government? What was the Progressives view?
3. Why did Prohibition lead to crime and violence?
4. How did the 18th Amendment differ from every other constitutional amendment in history?
5. Why do you believe the people changed their minds about Prohibition?