

## I. Prohibition & Organized Crime

1) Read the materials that follow. Then use these materials to answer the questions.

At midnight, January 16, 1920, the United States went dry. Breweries, distilleries, and saloons were forced to close their doors. Led by the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the dry forces had triumphed by linking Prohibition to a variety of Progressive era social causes. Proponents of Prohibition included many women reformers who were concerned about alcohol's link to wife beating and child abuse and industrialists such as Henry Ford who were concerned about the impact of drinking on labor productivity. Advocates of Prohibition argued that outlawing drinking would eliminate corruption, end machine politics, and help Americanize immigrants.



National Prohibition was defended as a war measure. The amendment's proponents argued that grain should be made into bread for fighting men and not for liquor. Anti-German sentiment aided Prohibition's approval. The Anti-Saloon League called Milwaukee's brewers "the worst of all our German enemies," and dubbed their beer "Kaiser brew." Yet even after Prohibition was enacted, many ethnic Americans viewed beer or wine drinking as an integral part of their culture, not as a vice.

The wording of the 18th Amendment banned the manufacture and sale (but not the possession, consumption, or transportation) of "intoxicating liquors." Many brewers hoped that the ban would not apply to beer and wine. But Congress was controlled by the dries, who advocated a complete ban on alcohol. A year after ratification, Congress enacted the Volstead Act, which defined intoxicating beverages as anything with more than 0.5 percent alcohol. This meant that beer and wine, as well as whiskey and gin, were barred from being legally sold.

Advocates did not believe it would be necessary to establish a large administrative apparatus to enforce the law. The federal government never had more than 2,500 agents enforcing the law. A few states did try to help out. Indiana banned the sale of cocktail shakers and hip flasks. Vermont required drunks to identify the source of their alcohol.

Enforcing the law proved almost impossible. Smuggling and bootlegging (smuggler's practice of carrying liquor in the legs of boots) were widespread. Two New York agents, Izzie Einstein and Mo Smith, relied on disguises while staging their raids, once posing as man and wife. But after a raid on New York City's 21, that trapped some of the city's leading citizens, their efforts were halted. In New York, 7,000 arrests for liquor law violations resulted in 17 convictions.

Prohibition failed because it was unenforceable. By 1925, half a dozen states, including New York, passed laws banning local police from investigating violations. Prohibition had little support in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest.

Prohibition did briefly pay some public health dividends. The death rate from alcoholism was cut by 80 percent by 1921 from pre-war levels, while alcohol-related crime dropped markedly. But seven years after Prohibition went into effect, the total deaths from adulterated liquor reached approximately 50,000, and many more cases of blindness and paralysis.

Prohibition quickly produced bootleggers, speakeasies, moonshine, bathtub gin, and rum runners smuggling supplies of alcohol across state lines. Hidden saloons and nightclubs were called speakeasies because one had to

speak quietly or “easily” to avoid detection. In 1927, there were an estimated 30,000 illegal speakeasies, twice the number of legal bars before Prohibition. Many people made beer and wine at home. Finding a doctor to sign a prescription for medicinal whiskey, sold at drugstores was relatively easy.

Cleveland had 1,200 legal bars in 1919, a year before Prohibition went into effect. By 1923, the city had an estimated 3,000 illegal speakeasies, along with 10,000 stills (place to make your own alcohol). An estimated 30,000 city residents sold liquor during Prohibition and another 100,000 made home brew or bathtub gin for themselves and friends.

Speakeasies commonly began to operate with connections to organized crime and liquor smuggling. Even though the police and US Federal Government agents raided such establishments, the business of running speakeasies was so lucrative that such establishments continued to flourish throughout the nation. This time period marks the beginning of organized crime as it explodes in the country. Prohibition also fostered corruption and contempt for law and law enforcement among large segments of the population. Harry Daugherty, attorney general under Warren Harding, accepted bribes from bootleggers. George Remus, a Cincinnati bootlegger, had a thousand salesmen on his payroll, many of them police officers. He estimated that half his receipts went as bribes. Al Capone's Chicago organization reportedly took in \$60 million in 1927 and had half the city's police on its payroll. Popular culture glamorized bootleggers like Chicago's Capone, who served as the model for the central characters in such films as *Little Caesar* and *Scarface*. In rural areas, moonshiners became folk heroes. The fashion of the flapper, dancing the Charleston in a short skirt, was incomplete without a hip flask.

With a huge consumer market unmet, organized crime filled the vacuum left by the closure of the legal alcohol industry. Homicides increased in many cities, partly as a result of gang wars but also because of an increase in drunkenness.

When the country entered the Great Depression, the jobs and tax revenue that a legal liquor industry would generate looked attractive. During his presidential campaign in 1932, New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, who never hid his fondness for martinis, called for Prohibition's repeal with the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment.

Even today, debate about the impact of Prohibition rages. Critics argue that the amendment failed to eliminate drinking, made drinking more popular among the young, spawned organized crime, disrespect for law, and encouraged solitary drinking and led beer drinker to hard liquor and cocktails. (One wit joked that "Prohibition succeeded in replacing good beer with bad gin.") The lesson these critics draw is that it is counterproductive to try to legislate morality.

Their opponents argue alcohol consumption declined dramatically during Prohibition, probably by 30 to 50 percent. Deaths from cirrhosis of the liver for men fell from 29.5 per 100,000 in 1911 to 10.7 in 1929.

## **. Interesting Prohibition Facts**

- "Bathtub gin" got its name from the fact that alcohol, glycerine and juniper juice was mixed in bottles or jugs too tall to be filled with water from a sink tap so they were commonly filled under a bathtub tap.
- The speakeasy got its name because one had to whisper a code word or name through a slot in a locked door to gain admittance.
- Prohibition led to widespread disrespect for law. New York City alone had about thirty thousand (yes, 30,000) speakeasies. And even public leaders flaunted their disregard for the law. They included the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, who owned and operated an illegal still.
- Some desperate and unfortunate people during Prohibition falsely believed that the undrinkable alcohol in antifreeze could be made safe and drinkable by filtering it through a loaf of bread. It couldn't and many were seriously injured or killed as a result.
- In Los Angeles, a jury that had heard a bootlegging case was itself put on trial after it drank the evidence. The jurors argued in their defense that they had simply been sampling the evidence to determine whether or not it contained alcohol, which they determined it did. However, because they consumed the evidence, the defendant charged with bootlegging had to be acquitted.

- When the ship, Washington, was launched, a bottle of water rather than Champagne, was ceremoniously broken across its bow.
- National Prohibition not only failed to prevent the consumption of alcohol, but led to the extensive production of dangerous unregulated and untaxed alcohol, the development of organized crime, increased violence, and massive political corruption. Amazingly, some people today insist that Prohibition was a success!
- Although Prohibition was repealed seven decades ago, there are still hundreds of dry counties across the United States today.
- Prohibition clearly benefited some people. Notorious bootlegger Al Capone made \$60,000,000...that's sixty million dollars...per year (untaxed!) while the average industrial worker earned less than \$1,000 per year.
- But not everyone benefited. By the time Prohibition was repealed, nearly 800 gangsters in the City of Chicago alone had been killed in bootleg-related shootings. And, of course, thousands of citizens were killed, blinded, or paralyzed as a result of drinking contaminated bootleg alcohol.
- The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) strongly supported Prohibition and its strict enforcement.

## Al Capone

**Alphonse Gabriel Capone** (January 17, 1899 – January 25, 1947), popularly known as **Al "Scarface" Capone**, was an infamous **Italian-American gangster** in the 1920s and 1930s. His business card reportedly described him as a used **furniture dealer** (fact)). Born in **New York City** to **Neapolitan** emigrants Gabriele and Teresina Capone, he began his career in **Brooklyn** before moving to **Chicago** and becoming Chicago's most notorious **crime** figure. By the end of the 1920s, the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** had placed Capone on its "**Most Wanted**" list. Capone's downfall occurred in 1931 when he was indicted and convicted by the **federal government** for **income tax evasion**.

Capone was notorious during the **Prohibition** era for his control of large portions of the Chicago underworld and his bitter rivalries with North Side gangsters such as **Deanie O'Banion**, **Bugs Moran** and O'Banion lieutenant **Hymie Weiss**. Raking in vast amounts of money from illegal prostitution and alcohol (some estimates were that between 1925 and 1930 the Capone organization was grossing \$100 million a year), the Chicago kingpin was largely immune to prosecution due to **witness intimidation** and the bribing of city officials, such as Chicago mayor **William "Big Bill" Hale Thompson**.

In 1928, Capone bought a retreat on **Palm Island, Florida**. It was shortly after this purchase that he orchestrated the most notorious gangland killing of the century, the 1929 **St. Valentine's Day Massacre**. Although details of the killing of the 7 victims are still in dispute and no one was ever indicted for the crime, their deaths are generally linked to Capone and his henchmen, especially **Jack "Machine Gun" McGurn**, who is thought to have led the operation. By staging the massacre, Capone was trying to dispose of his arch-rival **Bugs Moran**, who controlled gang operations on the North Side of **Chicago**. Moran was late for the meeting and escaped an otherwise certain death. Throughout the 1920s, Capone was often the target of attempted assassinations, being shot once in a restaurant and having his car riddled with bullets on more than one occasion. However, the assassins were normally amateurs and Capone was never seriously wounded.

## Thompson submachine guns



The **Thompson**, also known as the "**Tommy Gun**", was a family of **American submachine guns** that became infamous during the **Prohibition** era. It was a common sight in **gangster films** of the time, being used both by criminals and law enforcement officers. The Thompson was also known as the "Chopper", the "**Chicago Typewriter**" and "Chicago Piano". The Thompson was favored by soldiers and civilians alike for its compactness, **large .45 caliber bullet**, and high volume of **automatic fire**.