

Prohibition in America

What is Prohibition?

Prohibition was the amendment to the Constitution that outlawed alcohol in the United States. Prohibition was in effect from 1920-1933. During Prohibition, Americans could not sell, make, or transport alcohol, but that did not stop people from drinking it.

Many Americans supported Prohibition because they believed that alcohol's harmful effects outweighed people's right to drink. Supporters believed that outlawing alcohol would help Americans become healthier and rid the country of a lot of crime.

Use the following information to determine whether these suggested outcomes took place.

Responses to Prohibition

Select quotes from Prohibition-era figures.

"Our country has deliberately undertaken a great social and economic experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose"

Herbert Hoover, U.S. President

"It is impossible to tell whether Prohibition is a good thing or a bad thing. It has never been enforced in this country. . . . I believe that the percentage of whisky drinkers in the United States now is greater than in any other country of the world."

Fiorella H. LaGuardia, New York Congressman

"Prohibition is better than no liquor at all."

Will Rogers, actor

"I am the sworn, eternal and uncompromising enemy of the liquor traffic."

Billy Sunday, Evangelical preacher

"We are convinced that National Prohibition is fundamentally wrong . . . it conflicts with the basic American principle of local home rule and destroys the balance established by the framers of our government."

Pauline Sabin, founder of the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform

1920s Cultural Changes

Speakeasies

A **speakeasy** was an illegal bar or club. During Prohibition, illegal speakeasies far outnumbered pre-1920s bars. The term "speakeasy" came from the way people would whisper passwords in order to enter secret bars.

Flappers

Flappers were independent young women known for their short skirts (with hemlines just above the knee) and short "bobbed" hair. In the 1920s, women began to date and socialize outside of the house for the first time in America.

Before Prohibition, very few women went into bars and saloons, but speakeasies attracted them with jazz music, dancing, and mixed drinks.

Technology

What do hair dryers, traffic lights, pop-up toasters, and electric razors have in common? **They were all invented in the 1920s.**

In addition, previous inventions like the washing machine, vacuum cleaner, dishwasher, and automobile helped shape life in the 1920s. For the first time, the average American could afford these luxuries. They helped people, especially women, save time. They led to an improved quality of life.

Prohibition in America

Public Health, Rising Crime Rates, and Scofflaws



Al Capone was an incredibly successful bootlegger in Chicago. He ran the North Side Gang, which smuggled alcohol into the United States from Canada.

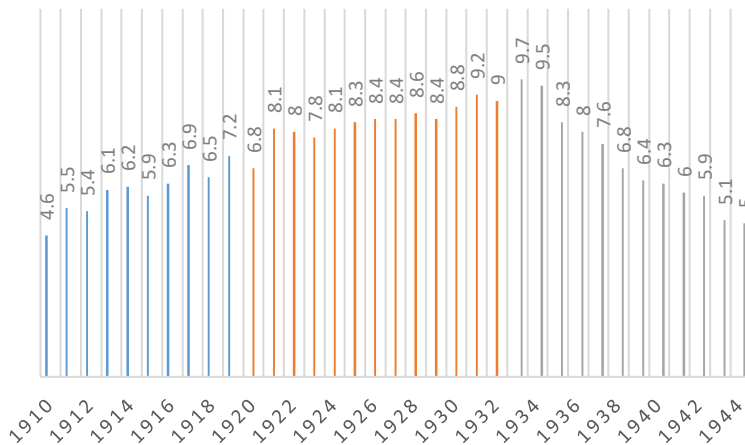
During Prohibition, public drunkenness and disorderly conduct crimes decreased. Alcohol consumption rates also decreased. Rates of cirrhosis of the liver, which is commonly connected to alcoholism, shrank significantly. The national suicide rate and the number of people admitted into mental hospitals for alcohol-related reasons also declined.

But crime by and large did not vanish. Homicide rates increased steadily and many people turned to **bootlegging**, or making and selling illegal alcohol. **Organized crime** spread as small neighborhood gangs began to create large bootlegging operations. Prohibition was the best thing that ever happened to the Mob. Mobsters became millionaires and household names.

Many people believed that Americans now viewed criminal activity as justifiable. A new word was coined for those people, "scofflaws."

HOMICIDE RATES 1910-1944 (PER 100,000 PEOPLE)

■ Before Prohibition ■ During Prohibition ■ After Prohibition



What do you think?

Record your analysis on a separate sheet of paper.

1. How did Prohibition effect American society?
2. Did Americans agree on Prohibition?
3. Was Prohibition successful?