

Prohibition and organized crime assignment

[History](#)



Prohibition and Organized Crime In 1919, America was torn with the decision of prohibiting liquor from being sold. There were many incentives to do so. However, political officials did not take into account that people would get what they wanted at all costs. With prohibition, America was set for an untamed drinking binge that would last thirteen years, five months, and nine days (Behr 91). Prohibition, though it was dignified, was a great failure that taught the United States valuable lessons about crime and corruption. Many Americans wanted to do away with liquor altogether.

The liquor industry had been proved a major factor in political corruption and was tied in with prostitution, gambling, and other associations (Morison 900). Congress provided for an amendment that would make the entire country prohibition territory. The amendment was as follows: Section 1. After one year from the ratification of this article, the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

Section 2. The Congress and the several states shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation. Section 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the constitution by the legislatures of the several states, as provided in the Constitution by the legislatures of the several states, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the states by the congress (" Prohibition").

Congress passed the Prohibition amendment in 1917, thirty-six states had ratified it by January 16, 1919, and it went into effect a year later. The eighteenth amendment provided no machinery for enforcement or penalties for violations, so Congress passed the Volstead Act in 1919, over President Wilson's veto. The Volstead act provided the laws and the machinery to help enforce the Eighteenth Amendment (United States History Society 851). Soon after prohibition went into effect, bootlegging started. This was necessary, because if gangsters, bootleggers, and speakeasies were to thrive, the liquor had to come from somewhere (Behr 92).

Small boats easily transported cargoes from Cuba into Florida and the Gulf states (Morison 900). Off every port from Maine to Miami, outside the three-mile limit, a fleet of ships waited with every variety of wine and liquor (Morison 900). Motor launches, fast enough to evade coast guard and enforcement agents, ran these cargoes ashore, where they were transferred to cars and trucks owned by bootleggers; but the truckloads often got "hijacked" by other smugglers, and usually the liquor was diluted with water before being sold to the public (Morison 900).

Even though millions of gallons of illegal liquor reached the shores of America, "rum-running" trips frequently came to grief as a result of incompetence, communication failures, greed, and mutual mistrust (Behr 134). Alcohol that was not smuggled into the country was usually "converted" from something else by unconventional methods. Millions of gallons of industrial alcohol, manufacture of which was permitted, were converted into bootleg whisky or gin, and bottled under counterfeit labels.

Liquor and wine licensed for “ medicinal purposes” often wound up in the hands and stomachs of healthy citizens.

For a citizen to easily get the alcohol, the majority of cities had speakeasies to replace the local saloon. In Rhode Island, one of the states that refused to ratify the Eighteenth Amendment or help enforce it, one could buy British gin by the bottle right off the shelves for ten dollars. Those who did not wish to support bootleggers and thus contribute to their crime and political corruption made their own “ bathtub” gin at home or acquired home-brewed beer and cider. The federal government arrested over half a million people and secured over 300, 000 for breaking the Volstead Act, but smuggling still increased (Morison 900-01).

The increase in smuggling was mainly due to the corrupt public leadership and gangland officials. Chicago had been an open city even before prohibition was a major issue, but it was getting much worse. The early First Ward District Democratic bosses, “ Bathhouse John” Coughlin and Michael “ Hinky Dink” Kenna, both sons of Irish immigrants, owed all of their power and considerable wealth to contributions from the brothel owners they routinely protected. Kenna was a saloon owner whose generous “ schooner” made it the most popular drinking place in town.

He was also, for several decades, a largely influential Democratic Party official. “ Big Jim” Colosimo, the most influential slot machine brothel owner, had been closely entwined with Kenna and Coughlin. Colosimo’s death in 1920, soon after the passing of the Prohibition amendment, had marked the passing of an era. His funeral was the first of the highly expensive,

ostentatious funerals that later became a ritual. Jonny Torrio, Colosimo's bodyguard, had killed him after "business differences" came between them.

Torrio, who inherited the Colosimo empire of speakeasies, breweries, and brothels, was soon in partnership with his bodyguard and close friend, the youthful New York Lower East Side expatriate Alfonso Capone (Behr 176-77, 184). Al Capone was a highly sophisticated person. He had an unimaginable public relations sense. Whether paying the hospital expenses of a middle aged woman bystander who had been severely wounded in the eye during an assassination attempt on him, or opening soup kitchens for the hungry after the stock market crash of 1929, Capone was always a humanitarian.

He was also an incredible media manipulator, and he even convinced respectable newsmen that he was merely a devious businessman who abhorred violence and was often singled out as a convenient suspect, even when he was innocent, and he could often prove it (Behr 179). The Chicago gangsters supported Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson openly and unanimously (Coffey 204). As a result of poor police appointments by Thompson, violent crime increased by fifty percent in just one year (Behr 183). The law enforcement agencies during this era were filled with corrupt and ineffective officers (Behr 176).

The police rarely interceded in the gangland disputes, nor did they intervene when rival gangs hijacked each other's liquor. As long as law enforcement officers were not injured, it was a private war that did not concern them (Behr 178). Everyone from the first-year patrolling policeman to the major politicians took bribes from the powerful underworld leaders and owners of

speakeasies (Thornton). Uniformed police in Chicago even regularly escorted delivery vans belonging to specially favored bootleggers and gangs (Behr 178). The judicial system was inadequate as well.

Out of 136 gangland murders that took place in Chicago during the first five years of prohibition, only six led to trials and of these, all but one ended in acquittals (Behr 186). In a three-year period, the Board of Pardons and Paroles freed 950 felons (Behr 187). The Chicago alliance between police and organized crime has never been broken (Morison 901). Among other things, the main reason Chicago became synonymous with gang warfare was the irresistible motivation for profit (Behr 177). Al Capone ran one Chicago gang and George " Bugs" Moran ran the other (Morison 901).

These gangs, like respectable corporations, battled for an even larger share of the market because it was clear to both that it was imperative to keep growing or subside (Behr 178). Therefore, these leaders, who made little or no attempt to hide their activities, used their links with politicians and politically appointed city officials, including the police and even the judiciary, to eliminate their rivals (Behr 178). The younger, greedier gangs of the Prohibition Era behaved far more ruthlessly than the earlier leaders, using terror as a weapon (Behr 178).

In four years there had been 215 unsolved murders in the Windy City (Morison 901). From 1920 to 1933, nearly eight hundred gangsters were killed in shootouts with other gangsters (Behr 177). The most familiar point in the Chicago gang war was the famous " St. Valentine's Day Massacre" of 1929. Al Capone's men, two of which were in plain clothes and two of which

were disguised as policemen, entered a building with machine guns and shotguns, surprising Moran's men, who were waiting to purchase a truckload of liquor from other bootleggers.

Capone's two uniformed men told all seven of Moran's men to face the whitewashed wall, and told them that they were subjects of a police raid. The men complied calmly. Police raids were often an annoyance, but professional gangsters did not resist them. Even if arrested, they could get out of jail by mid-afternoon the next day. The seven men stood against the wall as Capone's "policemen" frisked and relieved them of their weapons. This, too, was an inconvenience, but no more than that. The guns would be replaced and the Chicago courts were filled with judges who would dismiss hoodlums for carrying concealed weapons.

The seven men had no reason to suspect what was going to happen to them. They showed no sign of resistance. When the machine guns began to fire, it was too late for the seven to respond. In less than two minutes, a hundred bullets were fired, close to a dozen per victim. Later, only eight bullets were found to have missed the targets and hit the wall. At least three of the men did not die immediately, but two of them did so when shotguns were fired at their faces from only a few inches away. The third lived just long enough to keep the gangster code by refusing to help police identify his killers.

People who lived near the building described hearing what sounded like a pneumatic drill, and then that of a car backfiring. After hearing the noise, witnesses reported seeing two men in plain clothes emerge from the building, with their hands up, followed by the two uniformed men holding

guns to their ribs. All four of the men got into a black Cadillac, where the driver was waiting, and drove away. Citizens thought it was just another police raid and gave it no more thought. When the bloody St. Valentines Day Massacre was discovered, Chicago was able to claim it had produced the worst gang killing in history.

Capone had a strong alibi. At the time of the massacre, he was in Miami, on the phone with the local district attorney. Nobody was punished for the Valentines Day murders, and it took the Federal Government to get Capone, the planner, for tax evasion (Coffey 256-257). National prohibition did not have favorable effects on the nation (Morison 902). One New Jersey businessman claimed that there were ten times more places where one could get a drink during prohibition than there had been before. According to a study of thirty major U. S. cities, the number of crimes increased twenty-four percent between 1920 and 1921. Not only did the number of serious crimes increase, but also crimes became organized. Criminal groups organized around the steady source of income laws against victimless crimes such as consuming alcohol or drugs, gambling, and prostitution. Prohibition had serious and perverse effects on every aspect of alcohol production, distribution, and consumption (Thornton). Bravado induced many young people to drink, who otherwise, would not have done so (Morison 901).

Poisonous wood alcohol, inexpertly " converted" caused numerous deaths (Morison 901). There were innumerable painful deaths and blindness' inflicted by poisonous brews (Readers Digest Association 346). The only beneficiaries of prohibition were bootleggers, crime bosses, and forces of big government (Thornton). The gangs virtually ran the city (Behr 176). When <https://assignbuster.com/prohibition-and-organized-crime-assignment/>

there was no other source of liquor left, the clubs, speakeasies, and private dealers were compelled to turn to the bootleggers, and the bootleggers, under the thumb of the underworld bosses, became ready prey (Behr 177).

Even though they frequently ended up extremely wealthy, the wealth did not last long. Gangsters and bootleggers were often killed by their adversaries and many that were not killed ended up in federal prisons. They quickly found that their wealth and power were no use to them in prison, and many even died there. Prohibition led organized crime to new levels. Though at the beginning, Americans wanted to do away with the liquor, they soon found out that the cost was just too great. The numerous deaths caused by shootouts, police chases, and inexpertly converted alcohol, put doubts in the minds of many.

The corruption of those who were once trusted literally tore the country in half, and the irresistible motive for profit was just too great for those with weak morals. Prohibition produced little or no favorable effects for the United States. Though it was a dignified experiment, prohibition was doomed to failure since its beginnings. Works Cited Behr, Edward. Prohibition: Thirteen Years That Changed America. New York, Arcade Publishing, 1996 Coffey, Thomas M. The Long Thirst. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975 Morison, Samuel Eliot.

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